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'DE RANCÈ.

DE RANCÈ.

A POEM.

BY J. W. CUNNINGHAM, A. M.

VICAR OF HARROW.

“ Laissez-là ses erreurs; ose avoir sa vertu ;
Ose imiter Rancè, mais quand il a vaincu.”

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DE RANCÉ.

PREFACE.

A PERSUASION appears to prevail with many individuals, that it is scarcely possible to employ poetry successfully in the service of religion. On what ground this opinion rests it is not easy to say. It certainly has not the support of the most distinguished critical writers. The sentiment of Horace, for instance, on the importance of combining the 'useful' with the 'ornamental' in poetry has almost grown into a proverb. Longinus maintains, that he who aims at the reputation of a sublime writer, must add to the choice of a virtuous theme, a hearty endeavour to be virtuous himself. "He must," says this illustrious critic, in one place, "spare no labour to educate his soul to grandeur, and to impregnate it with great and generous ideas." And, in another, "the faculties of the soul will then grow

stupid, the spirit be lost, and good sense and genius lie in ruins, when the care and study of man is engaged about the morta', the worthless part of himself, and he has ceased to cultivate virtue and polish his nobler part, his soul."—In like manner, Quintilian has a whole chapter to prove, that a great writer must be a good man.—Beattie, in his ingenious and delightful Essays, has several chapters on the same subject. In Pope's Essay on Criticism, are many fine passages to the same effect.—Johnson affirms the object of poetry to be, to instruct by pleasing.—But, perhaps the same sentiment is no where more nobly expressed, than in the following lines of a modern poem.

" But of our Souls, the high born loftier part ;
Th' ethereal energies that touch the heart,
Conceptions ardent, labouring thought intense,
Creative fancy's wild magnificence ;
And all the dread sublimities of song
—These, Virtue, these to thee alone belong.
Chill'd by the breath of Vice, their radiance dies,
And brightest burns, when lighted at the skies :

Like vestal flames, to purest bosoms given,
And kindled only by a flame from heaven."*

Nor does this sentiment stand upon the mere judgment of critics ; it appears to me founded on just views of the constitution of our nature. He who seeks merely to please, can hope to touch only those chords in our bosom, which, if they vibrate at all, cease to vibrate as soon as the touch is withdrawn. But he who labours also to instruct, and who, with this object, takes up the great themes of morality or religion, illustrating, by examples, the misery of vice, or the struggles of virtue—"purging the mind either by pity or terror," may hope, if the execution of his work at all correspond with the grandeur of his object, to wake in the heart a thousand feelings, which have all the force and permanence of the great principles and interests with which they are allied, and from which they spring.

Far, indeed, from admitting that taste suffers from an alliance with religion, it might not be difficult to support the contrary proposition.

* *'Grant's Restoration of Learning in the East.'*

The proper objects of taste, are beauty and sublimity; and whoever has read the eloquent Essay of Mr. Alison, will not hesitate to admit that beauty and sublimity do not reside in the lines, colours, &c. &c. of the objects we contemplate, but in their power to suggest to us certain images and trains of ideas, which, by the constitution of our nature, delight and interest the mind. In other words, they will allow that the beauty or sublimity of any object, arises chiefly from the associations it suggests to the mind. In order, then, to ascertain the influence of religion upon the pleasures of taste, it may be well, for a moment, to place the irreligious and the religious man in situations of which the beauty or sublimity are universally admitted.

* Present, then, to the man without religion, a rich and varied landscape. It is *beautiful* to him, not merely because its lines are regular, or its colours vivid, but because it suggests to his mind a

* *Some of the following observations have appeared in another place.*

train of images which, from the constitution of our nature soothe and delight him. He sees in the sunny vale, and laughing valley, signs of peace and plenty, and joy. If he is an agriculturist, he sees arise from every spot, some witness to the principles and capabilities of his favorite art. If he is a philanthropist, he, perhaps, fancies in every cottage an abode of happiness and love; and in every peasant, a being pure and calm as the scene which he contemplates. But, at this point, the mere economist, or the man of mere benevolence, will stop. His associations are now exhausted, and his scanty possession of agreeable images has passed by. But, on the contrary, introduce the devout man to the same landscape, he also may be an agriculturist, and is necessarily a philanthropist. All the same images, therefore, with those which delighted the man without religion, may present themselves to his taste; but these impressions, by their very nature, decay. At the instant, however, when they are beginning to fade, and when, therefore, the imagination

demands some new stimulus, the devout man, perhaps, discovers in the distant horizon, some

—“ *Slender spire*

And *massy tower* from deep embowering shades,
Oft rising in the vale, or on the side
Of gently sloping hills, or loftier placed,
Crowning the wooded eminence !”

—At once a crowd of new and unfading visions burst upon his mind. He rises in a moment, as it were, from earth to heaven. In his eyes, the sunny vale, the unruffled lake, the flock sleeping on the brow, and the cottage peeping from the vineyard, are not merely the signs of repose on earth—they are the more touching signs of mercy and goodness in heaven. The grove, as it whispers, appears to him to say that God is good. Soothed and elevated by this silent reference to the Creator of so fair a scene, he seems himself to gain at once a new property and interest in all he sees.—

“ His are the mountains, and the vallies his,
“ And the resplendent rivers. His to enjoy

“ With a propriety that none can feel,
 “ But who, with filial confidence inspir’d,
 “ Can lift to Heaven an unpresumptuous eye
 “ And smiling say, ‘ *my Father made them all !* ’ ”

Can it be questioned in which of these two cases the taste will be most gratified—in which instance its enjoyments will be most pure, most numerous, most enduring ? How does the landscape brighten in their eyes, who can say,

Præsentio rem conspicimus deum
 Per invias rupes, fera per juga
 Clivos que præruptos sonantes
 Inter aquas, nemorumque noctem !—

Nor is the case different with regard to those objects usually denominated *sublime*. Place the man, for instance, who is without religion, amidst the wild and desolate scenery of savage nature, amidst sunless forests, bleak mountains, and rocks reft by the lightnings of heaven : the spectacle may, even in his eyes, be truly sublime. If his imagination be vigorous, he at once associates with the landscape many scenes of terror and

wo; he, perhaps, peoples the desert with the warriors of other days: he sees them scale the rugged mountain, he hears their shout upon the wind.—Perhaps, in each speck which diversifies the face of the wilderness, he fancies the boue of some pilgrim who has perished there. Or, according to his familiarity with history, he connects certain interesting facts with the scenery which he contemplates; and while, perhaps, his insensible companion conceives him merely to be contemplating a barren void, the mighty dead are passing in solemn review before him, and his eye is melted at the recollection of their complicated wants and agonies. He fancies, perhaps, the print of their last struggles upon the sand; and listens to their last groan in the low murmur of the torrent. But these grand illusions are not permanent! Soon the images which thus move and interest his mind are exhausted. Images derived from the scenes of this world, or from the events of time, seem to partake of the transitory nature of the scene of their origin.—On the coa-

trary, let the man of piety be carried into the same scenes. As he surveys the leafless desert, or blasted rock, steeps frowning upon steeps, rocks which stand like the skeleton of the world, waiting to be clothed, interminable wastes, where the Creator seems almost to have ‘forgotten to be gracious,’ he feels much, in common with the man without religion, to awe and solemnize his mind. His sensibility is not less awakenèd, his sympathies with the woes and sufferings of other men, and other ages, are not less acute. He begins, as it were, by ‘exhausting these worlds;’ but then he proceeds to ‘imagine new.’—He contemplates the landscape before him, by the solemn light of the sanctuary. He connects its stern and awful features, with the history of the dispensations of God. He sees, in the disordered face of nature, the evidence of that wrath which broke up the fountains of the great deep, swept the earth with its hurricane, and involved, in one universal ruin, the race of man. As the cloud blackens, and the flood descends, he views them,

perhaps, as the skirts of the overwhelming deluge; he almost sees the awful tide now roll at his feet, and now swell to his bosom. And, even when the mind begins to pall upon the contemplation of these awful visions, his sources of excitement are not exhausted. At once he is wrapt into other worlds—he anticipates the solemn scenes and events of a future existence—surrounds himself with the sublimities of the future judgment—and thus supplies to himself sources of solemn awe and holy solicitude, infinite as the nature and power of the Being whom he contemplates.

—Can it, in this instance, any more than the last, be doubted which of these spectators dwells in the region of the true sublime; to which of them its solemn and mysterious sources are most abundantly discovered, and the gates of its awful paradise most completely unlocked?

But let us next suppose the man without religion a spectator of another scene, to which the character of the true sublime is universally as-

cribed ;—of the plain or the mountain, scattered with the relics of ancient grandeur. Suppose him, for instance, seated upon the ruins of the Acropolis of that city which has been called ‘ the cradle of the sciences.’ Doubtless, if a man of sensibility, and of cultivated imagination, he will find much to interest and to awe his mind. It is not simply the marble waste of Athenian grandeur which he admires ; but no sooner does the eye survey its dilapidated splendour, than a train of affecting images seems to pass before him. He sees the heroes who fought and died beside the altar of liberty. Amidst the groves and porches, the scattered memorials and relics of Grecian wisdom, he seems to hear again the voice of her sages. It is not merely the dumb ruins which charm him ; it is the spirits which seem to walk among them ; it is the mighty scenes and images which they conjure up ; it is the train of magnificent ideas they suggest to the mind ; it is the admiration they awaken of men shut out from the light of modern wisdom, and who yet struggled so hard, and, in some instances, so successfully

against the inroads of superstition and ignorance. —Still, however, a multitude of instances are to be found, where men of much learning and refinement have been able to visit these scenes of prostrate grandeur, without any of these deep-toned emotions, these solemn sympathies, which belong to the perception of the sublime. They have been able to applaud the arch, without adverting to the hero who has passed under it. They have measured the porch, without thinking of the philosopher of whose school it was the entrance. They have painted the temple, without reflecting upon the perishable nature of the majesty of those gods whose name it bore. And, where a strong literary or political feeling has invested the scenes with features of greater sublimity, by the vivid remembrance of the wise and the brave, who have been actors upon it, yet it is difficult to follow the steps of a mere scholar or politician through those scenes of melancholy splendour, without feeling that a traveller endowed with the same powers, and with a different cast of mind, would have found there a loftier theme, and

awakened in us a more sublime emotion. There is, indeed, no pure and chastised gratification which the devout spectator is not able to enjoy, in common with the man of the world. If a lover of the fine arts, he also will rejoice to fix his eye, and let loose his imagination on the birth-place of his favourite pursuits. If a scholar, he will delight to study the pages of antiquity in the light by which they were written, and amidst the scenes by which many of their images and expressions were suggested. Many are the images of tender melancholy and mitigated awe, which will thus arise upon his mind. But these are in him only the beginning of those emotions which are properly denominated sublime. To him the wreck of grandeur which is scattered around, is one vast monument of the vengeance of an angry God. He sees inscribed upon the thousand prostrate pillars, the awful lesson, that God will not resign his throne to idols—that mere letters cannot secure the grandeur, or even the permanence of nations. He hears a voice echoing among the deserted walls, which says,

“ happy is the people who have the Lord for their God.” He sees, as it were, lingering amidst the ruins, the venerable figures of a Socrates or a Plato ; and hears them exclaim—‘ there is no true philosophy but the Bible.’ Whilst others survey the mere beauty of the broken altar, he regards it with peculiar awe, as, perhaps, a part of that dedicated to “ the unknown God.” And whilst they coldly measure the proportions of the Areopagus, he remembers that he there stands in the footsteps of an apostle, and surveys the ruin of those ‘ temples made with hands,’ in which the messenger of heaven had predicted the downfall of idolatry.—Here again, then, the question may be confidently asked—is not religion a fruitful source of the sublime—and is not he as bad a philosopher as a christian, who, lifting his hand against religion, strives thereby to annihilate those images of delight or of awe, with which her hand peoples both the ruins of art, and the wilderness of nature ?

It is evident, that many similar illustrations might easily be produced.

If, however, these suggestions should be considered as of too speculative a nature, it may be desirable to consider how much of the celebrity of men of genius has been owing, either to their possession, or to their assumption, of the religious character.

When, for instance, the *artists* of antiquity undertook to chisel the statues which should command the admiration of all times and places, they did not choose for their subjects the mere heroes of their country, but the gods ! It was a Hercules or Apollo, which levied the tribute of applause throughout all the regions of Heathenism. These great men were well acquainted with human nature, and they felt, that these emotions with which the spectator should approach the labours of genius, so as best to appreciate their worth, are called out by some object, which at once lifts him out of this lower sphere, and fills him with awe, astonishment, and humility. And, although their ignorance of the true religion deprived them of the noblest sphere of exertion, they ascended the only heights

accessible to them ; they took the gods of their absurd mythology, and contrived, by borrowing even the false glare of superstition, to throw a sort of glory round these statues, which extorted the admiration of the world. And, even in those instances, in which they departed from their almost universal practice of choosing a religious subject for their chissel, they endeavoured, by placing their statues in the temple of their gods, to give to their works something of a religious character.

In like manner, when the *painters* and *sculptors* of Italy arose, as it were, from the slumber of ages, they did not roam for subjects in the regions of romance, or even of modern history. They did not even follow the track of older artists amidst the temples of Heathenism ; but whilst they profited from the example of antiquity, they availed themselves of their own more favourable circumstances, and sought their subjects in the pages of the sacred writings. Thence, as from a quarry, they hewed their stones, and

wrought them into the enduring pillars of their own reputation. Consecrated by their close affinity to religion, these works seem to catch a portion of its perpetuity; and the Virgins of Raphael, the Infants of Corregio, and the "Ecce Hemo" of Guido and Carlo Dolce, have become the unchanging model to future artists. Great as is the interest felt in political revolutions, in battles, or in pacifications, it would be difficult to name a single picture designed to commemorate those events, which has engaged any very large share of the reputation possessed by many which are dedicated to religion.—In the case of the moderns, also, as in that of the artists of antiquity, the sculptor or painter has been glad to borrow for his works the authority and sanctity of religion; by suspending his noblest works on the sacred walls, and in the religious light of the temple of God.

Thus also in *music*; if it be asked in what circumstances has the genius of music chiefly displayed itself?—it may be answered confidently—

when music has borrowed the aid of religion. It is Handel who is the musician of all times and countries. It is Handel who is called "immortal," from the immortality of the subjects to which he has consecrated his powers. It is Handel who has almost caught a portion of the inspiration of his themes, and has sung the songs of angels, in strains scarcely unworthy of them—whose music has had power to collect large crowds to commemorate his name, and perpetuate his honours to the remotest ages.

The debts also of *poetry* to religion, or to those superstitions which were the darkened images of it, are not less considerable.—How are the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* ennobled by their mythological machinery—by the scales of fate, the frown of Jove, and the interposition of Minerva? And if it be asked, what moral lesson was taught by Homer to his readers—it may be answered, that he taught all the lessons which, in his own days, were deemed of the highest importance. The first object of philosophers or

teachers of any kind, in that state of society, was to make good patriots and soldiers ; and, therefore, to condemn the vices which interfered with the national welfare in peace and war. Now, be it remembered, that the grand topic of the Iliad is the fatal influence of the “wrath of kings” on national welfare, and successful war. Its first words, which are a sort of text, or thesis of the poem, are ΜΗΝΙΝ αἰεὶδῖ — Besides this, the Iliad upheld the national mythology ; and, by a bold fiction, bordering upon truth, displays, in Elysium and Tartarus, the eternal mansions of the good and bad—thus revealing, not by the light of revelation, but by blended flashes of genius and tradition, the strongest incentives to virtue, and the most terrific penalties of vice. Indeed, that both this and the Odyssey had a moral object ; and that this object was recognized by the ancients, may be inferred from Horace, who says of Homer, with reference to his first poem—

“Qui, quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile,

quid non Pleniùs ac meliùs Chrysippo aut Crantore decit."

And with regard to his second—

"Quid virtus, et quid sapientia possit
Utilè proposuit nobis exemplar Ulyssem."

In like manner, the plays of the great Greek tragedians had almost universally a moral object; and were further solemnized by being recited at the festivals of the gods.—Thus, also, the Odes of Pindar.

Nor is it more difficult to illustrate the same point, by a reference to the *Roman* writers—though most of the distinguished Latin works which remain to us, were produced at a corrupt period of the commonwealth.—Thus, in the case of the *comedians*. The plays of almost every nation are written less for perpetuity than immediate effect; and, therefore, partake more of the popular vices of the audience, than any other species of writing. Even Christianity has been unable, completely, to regulate and cleanse the stage. It is therefore, not a matter of surprise,

that writings of the celebrated Latin Comedians transmit to us few lessons of moral instruction. It is, however, remarkable, that in an instance in which one of these writers rose above the corruptions of his time and of his profession, and strove to impress one of those moral maxims* to which every heart consents,—the people of Rome, as by a general impulse, arose to applaud his bold and honourable deviation into the higher regions of truth and morality.—The odes of *Horace* have, many of them, a patriotic, and some of them a moral object. His epistles and satires are still more uniformly directed to an useful object. His offences against morality may be charged, partly upon the corruption of the times; partly upon the errors of his religion; partly upon the nature of his works, which appear to have been composed, more to serve a present exigency, than to delight a future age. And it may be confidently said, that if he takes a lower station in the temple of Fame than his

* *Humanus sum*, &c.

compatriot Virgil, it is chiefly on account of his trifling spirit, and his occasional immorality.—The works of *Virgil*, perhaps, beyond those of any other Heathen poet, are directed to the end of public instruction and improvement. He strenuously upholds the mythology of his country, and constantly refers the events of life to a superintending Providence. In the *Georgics* he inculcates the love of his country, and presses upon the higher ranks of society, then sinking into the lap of indolence and debauchery, the duty of cultivating its soil, and improving its peasantry. In the *Æneid* he exalts the character of the patriot and of the statesman; of the man who bore from the ruined walls of his country his aged parent, and his household gods. It is true, that this hero is a defective character; but, perhaps, he is scarcely defective as a Heathen; or, if he is, the subsequent events of his life are meant to cancel his crimes in Carthage. In short, Virgil appears to have endeavoured to instruct and improve his countrymen to the extent of his own attainments; and his deficiencies

are to be charged, rather upon his creed, than upon any negligence in himself. If we compare the descent to Tartarus, with the analogous passage in the *Henriade* of Voltaire, we find that the religious spirit of the ancient, lends a dignity to the scene in the one, which is wholly wanting to the other—that the passage in Virgil is sublime, because the author had piety—and in Voltaire contemptible, because he was without piety.

The poets of *our own country* may also confidently be brought to the same test. Why is it, for instance, that *Spenser*, though he has half buried his genius in the grave of allegory; though he is often prolix and obscure; though he exhausts the reader by a detail of the most uninteresting circumstances, is still contemplated, with fond reverence, as the father of English verse? It is, in great part, for a reason which Milton has assigned—that he is “sage and serious,” that behind the cloud in which he veils his morals, you see the hallowed figures of piety and truth.—Why is it again, that *Milton*, though

certainly inferior to his elder brethren of Greece and Rome, in the embodying of his ideas, and the execution of his vast designs, yet takes the precedency of them? It is partly, perhaps, because his theme embraces all the highest concerns of man. It is because, discovering the limited interest which is excited by the development of fugitive events, and the history of human crimes, he sought, in the scenes of an invisible world, more permanent and copious sources of the sublime.—And, finally, whence is it that *Cowper*, though unpopular in many of his topics; though careless in the structure of his verse; though somewhat overcharged in his satire; though sometimes dark, low, and prosaic; is yet the delight of so large a portion of his countrymen? It is not merely his true English spirit, his ardent love of liberty, his bold and idiomatical language, his strong vein of sense, his variety of imagery, or his love of nature which charm us; but it is what has been called, by a distinguished northern critic, the magic of his

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morals. It is because he never fails to introduce the Creator into the scenes of his own universe. It is because he sets the imagination roaming far beyond the bounds of space and time. It is because he draws so largely upon the fountains of scripture, and so continually addresses man in the language of God.

The author trusts he shall be pardoned for presuming to offer these observations, and especially for prefixing them to a poem of his own. He feels that it is difficult to express a dissent from others, without appearing to applaud ourselves ; or to prefix a criticism to a work without seeming to propose the work as an illustration of our own principle. He can, however, most unaffectedly and solemnly declare, that he has no such intention. He has not the presumption, in the smallest degree, to mingle his own name or pretensions with those of certain illustrious persons, from the exertion of whose genius the world has a right to expect both delight and instruction. He offers his own compo-

sition to no such ordeal as that by which men of high talents are satisfied to be tried. He presents it, not to the justice, but to the charity of the public ; and trusts that, with their accustomed kindness to himself, they will excuse something to a very inexperienced poet, and to a person engaged in duties of too solemn a nature to allow of all the laborious exactness which this species of composition demands.—Thus much, however, he thinks it right to say, that he has certainly kept in view that object which he has, in these observations, endeavoured to recommend to others. He has laboured to connect an important moral with his verses ; and to display, by example, *the misery of vice, and the happiness of virtue.*

In order to accomplish the end he had in view, the author has deemed it expedient to avail himself of some features in the history of the individual, whose name the poem bears. Although there are portraits of De Rancè, of which this poem, with considerable allowance for poetical license, would not present a very inaccurate co-

py ; some of his Roman Catholic biographers, who have had the best opportunities of discovering the truth, frequently present a much more favourable sketch of his early life. The author begs, therefore, to be clearly understood, as not pretending, in this poetical narrative, to historical exactness ; and he feels it the more necessary to press this point upon the attention of his readers, because he would not, willingly, become the calumniator of any man—and more especially of those to whose religious opinion he stands so strongly opposed. It appears to him a current fault of the age, to feel too little suspicion of the principles of Popery, and too little charity for its individual professors. Many of these last would have been an ornament to any church ; and why should we despair of those who love truth better than Popery, becoming, through the mercy of God, and the mild and holy influence of Christian charity, the pillars and ornaments of our own ?

There is only one more point to which the author feels it necessary to advert. He has been taught, by frequent experience, that there are

certain topics on which it is difficult not to be misunderstood—and such a topic appears to be that change of character which is wrought by the influence of religion upon the mind. If any critic, then, should be tempted to represent him as designing to give, in the history of De Rancé, such a precedent as may encourage the hopes of the enthusiast, or betray his readers into a conception, that a youth of profligacy is *likely* to end in an old age of religion—the author begs leave, most solemnly, to disclaim any such intention. He well remembers the sentiment of a distinguished divine, upon the only case of late repentance, which is recorded in the Scriptures—“one instance is given that the humble may not despair—and but one, that the careless may not presume.”

DE RANCÉ.

CANTO FIRST.

B 2

DE RANCÈ.

CANTO FIRST.

I.

" I TELL thee, Eugene, it is Chance
That speeds the arrow's fatal flight ;
Life is the momentary glance,
Of morn before an endless night—
Death is but dreamless, endless sleep :
Those who are wept, and those who weep,
From the cold grave to which they go,
Rise never or to joy or wo ;
I bow the knee to Chance alone,
And worship at her shadowy throne."

II.

Thus spake De Rancè—and no sign
In earth or heav'n was seen ;

No reddening bolt, from hand divine,
Flam'd in the blue serene.
All, all was silence, as though Chance
Reign'd through the fathomless expanse ;
As though no arm those spheres of gold,
On winged wheels, harmonious roll'd ;
As though the God of this fair world
Shrunk from the proud defiance hurl'd ;
And, mounted on his cloudy car,
Had fled to other skies afar,
Afraid to wage this Atheist war.

III.

Thus spake De Rancè.—Who is he
Thus school'd in bold impiety ?
What pregnant spot of Paynim earth
Gave to the godless monster birth ?
Say, did some lawless robber clan
Nurse the infant into man ?
Teach him to tread the path they trod,
To hate his fellow, curse his God ?
—Or dwelt the child, bereft, alone,
Where no bright lamp of science shone ;

Like some dark mountain, on whose head
The sun's blest rays were never shed ?
—Or on the tented field of strife,
Say—did he breathe the breath of life ?
And, cradled in an ark of blood,
Deem'd he the brave alone the good ;
All softer feelings laugh'd to scorn ;
His music the shrill bugle horn—
His pride the deeply dented scar—
His only God, the God of war—
For battle lost his only sigh,
His only pray'r for victory ?

IV.

No Paynim country gave him birth,
Nor shivering land of night,
Nor starv'd he midst the savage dearth,
Of wisdom's sacred light ;
No robber rear'd him up to man,
A branded outcast from the good,
In no loose camp his life began,
To horrors train'd, and nurs'd in blood.

The infant op'd his sparkling eye
In thy fair fields, sweet Brittany ;
Whence many a martyr'd Saint of old,
Arose to fill his throne of gold ;
And bold crusaders took the road,
To win the city of their God.
Nor of a sordid race was he,
Sprung from thy stem, great Chavigni ;
Whose title to thy vast demesne
Was writ by mighty Charlemagne.
Nor lack'd he aught that man could give
To bid his lifeless virtues live.
With sign of cross, at blessed font,
Richlieu had stamp'd his infant front ;
In cloister'd cell, with lessons sage,
Grave priests had fed his tender age ;
And taught his ardent eye to pore,
O'er classic tomes, and holy lore.

V.

Nor toil'd in vain the letter'd monk :
Into De Rancè's thirsty ear,

And thirstier memory, deeply sunk,
These lessons to fair science dear.
And he was skill'd, from earliest age,
To delve in mathematic mine
Or roam along the breathing page,
Where Tully's living splendours shine ;
Or scan, with philosophic eye,
Yon 'brave o'erhanging' canopy,
The blazing wonders of the sky ;
And he could touch the sacred lyre,
And glow with all a prophet's fire.—
They came to hear a *prophet* sing,
Alas! a *demon* swept the string.

VI.

The poet's lamp, as poets tell,
Is kindled only at the skies ;
But there's a flame—the birth of hell,
Which sometimes lights the poet's eyes.
Such was De Raucè's—and the flash
Which shot along his vivid page,
Like that which wakes the pealing crash,
And strife of elemental rage.

That flash could stir the soul to war,
But could not light the pilgrim's road ;
O !—it was not that eastern star,
That led the guilty to his God.
It lit unconsecrated flame,
In many a virgin's snowy breast ;
It bleach'd the reddening cheek of shame,
It scorch'd the vestal's modest vest ;
Unaw'd, its desolating fires,
The hallow'd hill of God assail ;
They strike the temple's awful spires,
They rend its venerable veil.

VII.

Such was De Rancé's foul offence ;
A fouler sees not heaven—
To blot the bright intelligence
For holiest purpose given—
To turn the sword which God has steel'd
Against the eternal throne—
To lift the wither'd arm He heal'd
Against The Mightiest One.
—I'd rather be the wretch who scrawls
His idiot nonsense on the walls,—

His gallant bark, of reason wreck'd,
A poor quench'd ray of intellect ;
With slubber'd chin, and rayless eye,
And mind of mere inanity,—
Not quite a man, nor quite a brute—
Than I would basely prostitute
My powers, to serve the cause of vice,
To build some jewell'd edifice,
So fair, so foul—fram'd with such art
To please the eye, and soil the heart ;
That he, who has not power to shun,
Comes, looks, and feels himself undone.

VIII.

'Tis true that, in her hurri'd flight,
On some diviner themes
De Rancè's winged muse would light—
To hate them all she seems ;
And harpy-like, she soars and sings,
And sheds pollution from her wings.
—Where sweet Provence her blushing rose
Hangs on the rocks, or gay alcove,

Her thousand maidens all arose
To hear De Rancè sing of *love*.
They came, they heard, they turn'd away—
O ! 'twas a song impure and rude ;
He did not paint th' ethereal ray,
Which warms the bosom of the good.
—His harp he swept with bolder hand,
To hymn the praise of *liberty* ;
Around, a thousand warriors stand
To catch the blessed harmony.
They came, they heard, they turn'd away—
More loyal than the brave are none ;
They loath'd the lawless, graceless lay,
Which curs'd the altar and the throne.

IX.

Such was the bard, and such the mind—
Himself the model of his verse ;
Bad though the portrait he design'd,
The sad original was worse.
His was the lawless love, the hate
Which time nor space can mitigate ;

The giant rage the hills which rent,
And hurl'd them at th' Omnipotent.

Such was the bard, and, O! his look
Bore witness to the hell within—

Study that face—you read a book,
Stamp'd with the wretchedness of sin.
And yet, upon this haggard face,
Would sometimes wake a sudden grace ;
A milder beam would warm his eyes,
A blush upon his cheek arise,
Which seemed to say—that, in that breast,
By demon spirits long possess'd,
Virtues with vices rarely link'd
Lay pent, and struggling, not extinct ;
And promis'd that, in happier hours,
This rugged soil should burst with flowers.
But—better trust the fleeting skies,
Than all these airy prophecies :
What flowers are *now*—are such as those

That spring on Ætna's ardent side ;
The peasant climbs to pluck the rose,
As at his touch, the fiery tide

Sweeps down the mountain, and he dies
To his fool's hopes a sacrifice.

X.

De Rancè lov'd the chase—his horn
Would often wake the lazy morn ;
And, echoing the dark woods among,
Rouse to the sport the leitering throng.
O, it was brave to see them mount,
When numbers you could scarcely count,
With sylvan trophies gayly deck'd,
And champing coursers, rainbow-neck'd,
Issued in all the pride of state,
From Viret's antiquated gate,
Dashing the virgin frost away
Which silvers every dancing spray—
—To see them bit the indignant steed,
Now urge, and now restrain his speed ;
And, now, some misty headland scale,
Whence they may view the waking vale,
The kindling orb, half set, half risen,
Just breaking from his cloudy prison ;

Of day and night the dubious strife,
 The landscape struggling into life—
 O, it *were* brave—could you forget,
 That on De Rancè's brow is set
 Thy mitre Tours—to man terrene,
 Nought but a crown of thorns I ween ;
 —That heaven has to his watch consign'd
 A measureless expanse of mind,
 Souls that are kindred with the sky,
 —The sparks, the breath, of Deity.
 —*Who*, if the reckless shepherd sleep,
 —*Al*, *who* shall feed these million sheep ?

XI.

Many a chase have hunters rode,
 Swift as the mountain wind ;
 All, all, the panting courser goad,
 One half are left behind.
 But never chase like that was known,
 When from the woods that skirt the Rhone,
 The deer was rous'd—his fiery glance
 Stretching at once o'er half of France.

He spans her vales he climbs her steep,
From giddy rock to rock he leaps,
And covers, in a single chase,
Plains it fatigues the eye to trace :
See, now, he flags, he gasps for breath,
Hangs over him the bird of death ;
He dives into the yawning flood—
Dy'd are its silver waves with blood.

XII.

But, who are those, the mighty two,
Sole relics of the Sylvan crew,
That headlong from yon hill descend ?
De Rancè, and De Rancè's friend,
The noble Eugene—two in name,
In love, or fiery hate, the same.
Of all the troop that rous'd the deer,
But these, his dying murmurs hear ;
And their's, if mead it be—the mead—
The honours of his palmy head ;
Which, mounted high, in hall of state,
The hunter's praise shall celebrate ;
And tell to hunter tribes around,
That man may emulate a hound.

XIII.

The chase is o'er—and spent the day—
The sun's last ineffectual ray
Dies on the mountains—not a star
Shines o'er their path—alone—afar
The hunters tread some unknown soil,
Through weary wastes, and forests toil—
They see alone the lightning's gleam,
They hear alone the raven's scream,
Or lean wolf's melancholy howl,
Or screeches of the boding owl.
But, in De Rancè's frozen breast,
Was cowering fear an unknown guest ;
And, dark or light—'twas one to him,
The battle, or the cloister dim ;
The icy caverns of the dead,
Where the pale ghost is thought to tread—
At all, this man of iron laugh'd ;
Draughts from the holy chalice quaff'd,
And curs'd, for superstitious fool,
The man who, taught in stricter school,
With reverend eye, and feet unshod,
Approach'd the altar of his God.

XIV.

Nor blame I him whose smile severe
Rebukes the superstitious fear
Of fancy-ridden men who quake,
If but a leaf unbidden shake—
Or, if they stumble o'er the tomb,
Or hear, through evening's deepening gloom,
A distant bell, with note profound,
A solemn 'requiescat' sound ;
Or, in some aisle, at dead of night,
See the pale moon's unearthly light
Cast through the deeply tinted pane,
What fancy deems, a bloody stain.
Such fears are growth of sordid root,
Religion's weeds, and not her fruit ;
Yet not so vile these baby fears,
As Levity, which nought reveres ;
Which, when the thunder shakes the sky,
Feels not the present Deity ;
Which rashly treads the holy place,
Gazes where angels veil their face ;
And when the shaft of vengeance flies,
Dares it by new impieties.

XV.

Such, as fresh terrors mutter round,
As sheeted lightnings swept the ground,
And forked flashes through the gloom
Seem'd opening up a world to come ;—
Such was De Rancè's impious mood,
Such accents echo'd through the wood ;
Boldly the smoking waste he trod ;
He spoke of Chance, and mock'd at God.
It was as though some maddening wretch
His pointed steel to heaven should stretch,
Bare to the bellowing cloud his head,
And bid its lightnings strike him dead.

XVI.

They struck him not—for mercy flew
To sheath the sword which justice drew.
“ But, Ah, yon pointed rocks among,
What giant figures steal along ?
Sawest thou De Rancè, as the ray
Of lightning kindl'd sudden day,
Its living flashes sudden glance
Along some carabine or lance ?

C

There was a hand that grasp'd that steel—
I seem'd to see, with hasty wheel.
A martial troop no eye could count,
Check their swift steeds, stop, look, dismount,
And sink yon tangl'd brakes between,
As though to see and be unseen.
Grant this be not the bloody glen,
Where Pirot keeps his robber den ;
And, from the ledges of the rock,
Springs like the tiger on the flock ;
For swift, indeed, the traveller's wing,
Who 'scapes that tiger's deadly spring."

XVII.

Thus, Eugene ;—and, as yet he spoke,
Another flash the darkness broke :
" Hark ! is not that the signal word !"
At once the volleying peal is heard,
The hissing bullet cuts its way,
The ruffians spring upon their prey :—
Will no one stay the crimson flood
Of honour'd Eugene's ebbing blood ?

Will no hand staunch the mortal wound?—
Alas! he staggers to the ground—
A robber shuts his stiffen'd eyes,
And murderers sing his obsequies:

XVIII.

But where's De Rancè?—Did he fall
A victim to the fatal ball?
Or, shielded by an unseen hand,
Did he escape the robber band?
See him, amidst the unequal strife,
Nor spare, nor prodigal of life,
Now boldly deal the dexterous blow,
Now flying from the thickening foe;
Too brave, what might be met to shun,
Too cool to fight and be undone.
See where he cleaves the lofty crest
Of him who on his footsteps prest;
And now he gives his courser rein,
And now it smokes along the plain.
Speed, speed, De Rancè—in thy rear
Their clattering hoofs of flint I hear—

—Hark ! where yon torrent mutters hoarse,
Thither, ah, thither bend thy course ;
Plunge boldly o'er its rocky side—
Who knows—that darkly rolling tide
May save, whom nothing else can save :
E'en robbers reverence the brave—
Fear for themselves, respect for thee,
May give thee life and liberty.

XIX.

He leaps the rocks—they crowd the brink—
' See, see, this daring spirit sink—'
He rises—mark his struggling hand—
' Will none of all the robber band
Dive for the prey ?'—One hardy wretch
Leaps desperate down—I see him stretch
His crimson hand—that well-aim'd shot
Must fix De Rancè's lingering lot.

XX.

'Tis fir'd—an angel sees its flight,
And, stooping from his throne of light,

Guards with a Seraph wing a breast
Untenanted by heavenly guest—
Guides the swift ball to where his side
By belt of steel is fortifi'd ;
From which his hunter quiver hung,
And arrow with its forky tongue,
And bugle, that proclaim'd afar
The triumphs of the Sylvan war.
It struck—and, bounding from the blow,
Fell flatten'd in the wave below.

XXI.

I will not say, that as he stood
Firm on the mountain brow,
And saw behind that glen of blood,
And gulf that roar'd below ;
And heard the robbers' lessening shout,
And watch'd them track their backward rout ;
And mus'd of the unequal strife,
Where Eugene paid his forfeit life ;
And trac'd upon his shatter'd side
The death that he had almost di'd—

—I will not say—*that* heart so rude
Felt not a touch of gratitude ;
That on that mind of thickest night,
Beam'd not a ray of heavenly light ;
But, if it beam'd, short was the day,
Soon quench'd in clouds that morning ray ;
And if a tear bedews his eye,
He hastes that woman's drop to dry.
No accents from his lips arose
To break the mountain's dead repose ;—
No echo from the rock or wood
Return'd his song of gratitude ;
No cross was planted on the brow,
A record of the pilgrim's vow.

DE RANCÉ.

CANTO SECOND.

DE RANCÉ.

CANTO SECOND.

I.

THE old in guilt, though young in years,
Shed few, and those but transient tears.
The silver dew-drops on the spray,
Which the first sun-beam dries away—
The weepings of the polar shower,
Which harden ere they reach the flower—
The insect sporting on the beam,
The fleecy cloud, the summer stream,
The manna melting on the plain,
The midnight image of the brain,
Are not so fugitive and brief,
As *their* unconsecrated grief:—

Soon, in the scorching flame of sense,
Dries their pale tear of penitence.
And such, I ween, the swift career
Of virtue in De Rancè's breast ;
Thus dri'd his penitential tear ;
Thus sank his shadowy grief to rest.
Whatever met the rising sun
Had vanish'd ere his race was run.

II.

—The morn is bright, the mountain's side
With million airy tints is dy'd—
Glitters the thorn and purple heath,
And fan him with their dewy breath :
The monarch eagle climbs the sky,
At the fierce sun to light his eye ;
Her giddy course the skylark steers,
To catch the music of the spheres ;
To learn the notes to angels given,
And steal for man the songs of Heaven.

III.

De Rancè, musing, trod his way,
 "Heaven meant us (cri'd he) to be *gay* ;"
 Aye—*good* and *gay*—But he who tries
 To cut the knot which nature ties,
 To break the bans proclaim'd by God,
 To seek his happiness in Vice,
 Shall feel the terrors of the rod,
 Which sways our mortal destinies.
 Dark are the flowers which round him blow,
 The chaplet on a victim's brow ;—
 Sad are the joys of which he's vain,
 The music of a maniac's chain.
 —De Rancè talk'd of Peace—her nest
 She made not in that stormy breast.
 She hovers round the martyr's pile,
 She lingers in the sacred aisle ;
 Seizes the prisoner's dungeon key,
 Touches his chains—and he is free.
 She hovers o'er the sick man's bed,
 Rests on her downy wing his head ;

Lifts from bright heaven the awful veil,
And bids his eye the Godhead hail.

IV.

Such peace De Rancè never knew ;—
Still as the breath of morning blew,
And flowers the glittering dew-drops quaff'd,
And every sunny valley laugh'd ;
And round the giddy Chamois play,
And all the world kept holiday—
E'en his stern features caught awhile
Sweet nature's universal smile ;
And he who saw, and knew him not,
Had said—' how blest De Rancè's lot !'
But he who watch'd with searching eye
The smiles that on his pale lips play'd,
Saw dagger'd grief in ambush lie,
Eager to sally from her shade.
Such smiles are sorrow's flimsiest dress—
The tortur'd bosom's drunkenness ;
The roses scatter'd on a shroud,
The flashes of the thunder cloud.

V.

And now he spans the tedious vales,
And now the mountain's breast he scales;
Uncertain, in the blaze of day,
Whither to bend his doubtful way,
But when the star of eve arose,
Her place the fainting traveller knows;
At once he lifts his aching eye,
And finds his compass in the sky;—
'Tis nature's compass, seen by all
Her travellers o'er this mazy ball—
—The pilot, as his crazy bark
Shoots round the headland, vast and dark,
Sees, shuddering, as these beacons glow,
The hungry rock that lurk'd below;
—Panting, amidst the dark simoom,
The thirsty Arab waits his doom;
He hears the death-bird's fatal shriek,
He hears the vulture whet her beak;—
At once, amid the kindling skies,
These million holy lamps arise—

It seems as though some hand unfurl'd
A glittering standard to the world;
To scatter every pilgrim's fears,
To light his path, to dry his tears.
—Nor these alone refresh their eye
With yonder jewell'd canopy;—
How joys the Saint, in cloister dim,
By this chaste light to chant the hymn,
To let his winged fancy rove
Amidst these orbs of Rest and Love;
To dream of all that feeds the sight,
Of those who fill the thrones of light;
Whilst ever and anon his ear
Sweet and mysterious hymnings cheer;
Faint echoes of the mystic ode,
That chants the glory of our God—
—The song which rolls from east to west,
Proclaiming that 'the good are blest.'

VI.

Nor only these—De Rancè, too,
Felt courage kindle in the view,

As bright Orion's belted ray,
Shed on the night a milder day.
Not slow, or hesitating, now,
He boldly breasts the mountain brow ;
And, piloted by heavenly guides,
Through dark ravine or torrent glides ;
Thoughtless, and thankless, onward hies,
Musing on new felicities—
For past and present want the power
To cheer the bad man's aching eye ;
And, bankrupt at the present hour,
He draws upon futurity.

VII.

—And now the sleeping rocks among,
Echoes this minstrel's gracious song ;
The wakeful bird that shuns the morn,
Sits listening on her pointed thorn ;
And starts to hear, in spot so lone,
A song, O, how unlike her own.

—“ I was not born, the lamp to trim,”—
Of viewless gods the praise to hymn ;

To stifle all the joys, of sense,
And make a joy of abstinence.

“ Mine be the lamp of Laura's eye,
Her praise my only melody ;
Her's be the shrine at which I bow,
To her be paid my only vow.”

VIII.

Here ceas'd the unpriestly bard to sing ;
For now the moon with crimson ray,
Rose on the horizontal ring,
As reddening at the guilty lay ;
Just as you've seen a sudden blush
Wake on a virgin's cheek of shame,
O'er the pale white unbidden rush,
And wrapt it in a robe of flame.
—O, as that conscious orb arose,
How gleams the hill, the vale, the stream,
And all their sleeping charms disclose,
At once to th' unobtrusive beam.

It fell upon the snowy flock,
Which slept beneath the frowning rock ;
It fell upon that rock's dark brow,
And seem'd to silver it with snow—
So swiftly all its darkness fled,
So brightly beam'd its hoary head.

IX.

But, not this flock of silver fleece,
Nor sable brow, in gems array'd,
Nor sleeping nature's smile of peace,
De Rancè's steps delay'd.
—See, as the moonlight circle spreads,
With what hurrying step he treads ;
And as he gains that mountain top,
I see the eager wanderer stop
And gaze, as if to pierce the cloud
Which wraps the valley in its shroud.
—And now I see the moon-beam fall
On yonder torrent's banner'd wall—
O, 'tis the hall of Chaumont's power—
And Laura sleeps in yonder tower ;

Of that fierce chief, the darling child ;
—Nor brighter does yon moon-beam rise,
Than the swift ray so brightly wild,
Which flashes in her glancing eyes.

X.

—Not brighter—but, alas ! more pure—
Once she was pure as she was bright,
De Rancè spread the accursed lure,
And quench'd that ray of virgin light.
Both, nurs'd in superstitious bowers,
Were pledg'd to consecrate their hours,
Their passions, bodies, souls, to God—
On all these awful vows they trod—
And chang'd the altar for the styè
Of sordid sensuality.

XI.

I laud, and love the man, around
Whose brow, or force, or craft has bound
Bonds such as these—if he forsake
A bigot's creed, and refuge take

Where sainted mercy's modest gem

Shines in religion's diadem ;

And bigot priestcraft dares not bind

Her gnawing irons on the mind ;

And reason fastens every tie

Forg'd by the hand of piety.

I laud him if, with high disdain

Of bonds like this he burst his chain,

And nobly panting to be free,

Seek on the soil of Liberty

The honour'd altar of my sires,

Whose chaste and holy fires,

Kindled by seraph'd hosts above,

Illume the torch of wedded love—

Rise on us, like some better sun,

And melt two beings into one.

—But, red with guilt, the hands which rend

 Their unchang'd compact with the skies,

And Deity essay to bend

 To fickle man's inconstancies—

—Who still retain the bigot creed,

Are strict in faith, but foul in deed,

XII.

—Such was *their* crimson crime—but who
That saw heaven's arch of liquid blue,
That watch'd the moonlight vault serene,
That drank the evening's scented breath,
Could dream that in such smiling scene,
Lay ambush'd deep the bolt of death?
Heaven seem'd to lend its brightest ray
To light the robber to his prey—
—It did but *seem*—in that fair sky,
Was planted heaven's artillery—
Prophetic roll'd that crimson star,
The herald of approaching war.

XIII.

But, O, De Rancè has no eye
For omen, now, or prophecy.
Before that sky has time to lower,
His lover's feet have swept the vale ;
He pants beneath the frowning tower
Where wont to sing his nightingale.

—She sang not now—but yet the lamp
Shone from her airy cell,
As though, of all that drowsy camp,
She was the sleepless sentinel.

XIV.

—But is she sleepless?—then her ear
Must catch the signal note he tries---
He strains her silver voice to hear,
'Tis echo's heartless voice replies.

“And can she sleep! O faithless maid,
“Sleep---when De Rancè wakes;
“Sleep---when, by steps so long delay'd,
“His plighted vow he breaks?

“Twice seven times rose the summer sun---
“He came not with the light;
“As oft its tedious course was run---
“He came not with the night.

“The widow'd turtle does not sleep,
“She wanders o'er the heath,

"She goes alone to droop and weep,

"She sleeps the sleep of death."

XV.

Thus sang Dé Rancè—but the strain

Of anger di'd upon his lyre ;

Love mounting on her throne again,

Extinguish'd every other fire.

De Rancè lov'd, as few can love

Who wantonly delight to rove

From sweet to sweet—the honey'd flower

With thirsty talon to devour ;

Then wing their flight to unknown sky,

And leave the withering stalk to die.

De Rancè lov'd as those have done

Whose souls are satisfied with *one*.

XVI.

"Sleeps she?"—he cries—"a lover's grief,

"A broken heart's intense distress,

"In waking dreams deni'd relief,

"Pursues it in forgetfulness---

" O, if she sleeps she sleeps, in vain--
" He who should watch her feverish form
" Would see an inward hurricane
" That fairy bower of peace deform.
" The body sleeps---the winged mind
" Roves wildly on the viewless wind,
" Dives with De Rancè in the flood---
" Shrinks from a dagger wet in blood---
" Like wither'd hag, with midnight spell,
" Peoples the air with shapes of hell---
" O, let me wake her---and destroy
" These dreams of wo by sights of joy."---
---The lover said, and fondly flew
To fright the dreams his fancy drew.

XVII.

Built on a rock, that high Chateau
Frown'd on the wondering vale below ;
Its fragments scatter'd far and nigh,
Taught this world's mutability.
Huge masses of its antique tower,
Beat down by the resistless power

That slowly rears its iron mace,
And shakes the rocky bounds of space,
Lay, in the wildest ruin hurl'd,
Like relics of an older world.
On these, its gayly painted wreath,
The flaunting Clematis had hung ;
And, here and there the purple heath
Glittering amidst the gray stones sprung---
Like youth and age, in fond embrace,
Or garland on a beldame's face.
---And there, I ween, that no gray stone
Was to De Rancè's eye unknown.
For often had he linger'd there,
Watching for Laura's foot of air ;
And loiter'd oft with that weak maid,
Amidst this unfrequented shade.

XVIII.

It might have been the thundering shock
Of crimson-handed war ;
But the hard face of that dark rock
Was seam'd by many a scar---

It might have been the fiery bolt
Which, as the angels fell,
Flam'd vengeance on their foul revolt,
And drove them down to hell—
That deeply rent its iron face—
But, at its stern and awful base,
There yawn'd upon the startl'd eye,
Depths which the daring dar'd not try—
—None dar'd, save one—whose heart of steel
Felt not the throbs which others feel.
De Rancè fear'd not—though no sound
Disturb'd that cavern'd world profound,
Though nought that lives explor'd that gloom,
Save the small bat on leathern wings ;
Though vast the vault as th' awful tomb
Where Egypt sepulchres her kings.

XIX.

Fearless was he—and oft he trod,
With Lion's heart that drear abode ;
For sooth to tell, when first his lamp
Gleam'd on those walls so dark and damp,

D

And each bright drop appear'd a gem
Set in a kingly diadem ;
He saw, amidst that cavern wide,
A door pierc'd in its rocky side,
Which, opening to a spiral stair,
Led from this region of despair,
From caves where night her vigil kept,
To the lone tower where Laura slept.
Once found, that path was ne'er forgot—
In these dark caves the lover's plot
How to evade a father's eye,
And how to shroud her infamy.
And often down that spiral stair,
Would Laura wind, like vision fair
Seen in the shades of night—and start,
—For fearful is the guilty heart—
If but a sparkling dew-drop fell,
Or toll'd the sullen castle bell.

XX.

And 'twas to this deep-veil'd ascent,
'That now his steps De Rancè bent,

Eager to dry the waking tear,
Or scare the feverish dream,
Night's visionary fear,
By love's enchanting beam.
—He gains the arch—he enters there,
Treads the deep cave, ascends the stair,
Mounts o'er the ample corridor,
Reaches and grasps th' unhallow'd door.—
Nor halts he long—his eager hands
Throw wide the portal, and he stands
In that fair room which aye had been
Of his sad joys the blushing scene ;
The thorny bower of sordid vice,
The sinner's mournful Paradise.

XXI.

But where is she—Queen of that bow'r,
'Midst many sweet, the sweetest flow'r ?
—“ Laura—De Rancè calls thee—come
“ Greet a poor wanderer to his home ;
“ 'Twas force detain'd me—for my soul,
“ True as those circlers round the pole,

"Ne'er left thee, sweet one—but, with thee
"A prisoner, deem'd it liberty—
"Laura—De Rancè calls thee—come
"Find in my breast thy wonted home."

XXII.

She lists not—comes not—not a word
Responsive to his call is heard ;
No rising laugh, but half conceal'd,
The playful, hidden maid reveal'd ;
No struggling sigh, but half suppress,
Betray'd the agonized breast.
'Twas still as death—still as the hour
When heaven's half exerted power
Had fram'd the worlds—had spread the sea,
But life had not begun to be—
—"Laura! De Rancè calls—arise
"And sun me with those angel eyes ;
"Well mightst thou shroud those orbs in sleep
"When thou couldst only wake to weep."

XXIII.

She rose not—look'd not—can it be ?

“ Is Laura tir'd of love and me ?

“ Or, scar'd to feel herself alone,

“ To other wing than mine hath flown ?

“ Return, poor bird, to thy cold nest,

“ To th' altar of De Rancè's breast.”

—But, ah ! in yonder distant room

A lamp half dissipates the gloom—

—“ She *may* be there—Ay, there she *is*—

“ Haste, haste De Rancè—print thy kiss

“ On those full lips—gaze on that eye,—

“ The living throne of ecstasy.”

XXIV.

He comes—O mark his eye-ball glare—

—Not Laura—Laura's *corpse* is there—

Disease has laid his withering hands

On that fair form—the brittle bands,

That chain'd the soul gave way—

It burst its tenement of clay

—How bright she *was*, let memory dream;
Death has put out that morning beam.

XXV.

In coffin'd pomp, behold her lie,
Vacant that throne of ecstasy,
Extinct, at once, its living fires,
As when the spiry blaze expires,
Of snowy Hecla's ardent head,
And o'er the smoky plains,
A stiller, deeper night is shed,
And double darkness reigns.
—“Go—print thy kiss on that full lip—”
Alas!—the bower where bees might sip
Fragrant no more—that marble cheek
Corruption's purple fingers streak—
Though many a flower is scatter'd there,
To show that she was young and fair;
Corruption's dark and fetid breath
Hangs, cloud like, o'er that bed of death.

XXVI.

—De Rancè might have learn'd to endure
The pangs no mortal hand could cure—
And to the storm of dark distress
Have turn'd the shield of stubbornness—
Or fill'd with new and varied bliss
His aching bosom's sad abyss—
Perhaps he might have learn'd to gaze
On that wan cheek where death might blur,
But had not power to raze
Beauty's ethereal character.
But as he watch'd the prostrate maid,
He saw, or seem'd to see,
On that dark brow the darker shade
Of mental agony.
And stamp'd upon that front so fair,
The ghastly frown of dumb despair ;
And, lingering on the lip of death,
A curse on him who broke the fence,
And rudely from the unspotted wreath
Rent the sweet flower of innocence,

Seem'd she from that dark bier to rise,
And fix on him her rayless eyes ;
Seem'd she—her fleshless arm to stretch,
As though to drag the struggling wretch
Whom angry heaven refus'd to save,
Down to her cheerless, hopeless grave—
There, on a couch of fire to lie,
Wedded in hopeless misery.

XXVII.

It might be fancy—but the power
Of fancy in that penal hour,
When heaven, to avenge the foul abuse
Of goodness, lets its terrors loose—
Is great, as though her shadowy train
Were not the figments of the brain ;
As though not sketch'd in lifeless dies,
Her fleet and airy nullities—
It might be fancy—be it so—
Still, to the inward eye
More dread such visionary show
Than broad reality.

A single tear he did not shed

He did not strike his throbbing breast---

You saw him clasp his bursting head,

---An idiot laugh proclaim'd the rest.

DE RANCÉ.

CANTO THIRD.

DE RANCÈ.

CANTO THIRD.

I.

Of all the knots which nature ties,
The secret sacred sympathies
That, as with viewless chains of gold,
The heart a happy prisoner hold—
None is more chaste, more bright, more pure,
Stronger stern trials to endure—
None is more purg'd of earthly leaven,
More like the love of highest heaven—
Than that which binds, in bonds how blest,
A daughter to a father's breast.
He, robb'd by death of half his life—
—That better half his bosom's wife,—
Sees, as his widow'd eye-lids rove,
In quest of well-remember'd bliss—

—In this fair creature of their love,
As though let loose from Paradise,
The sainted mother breathe again—
Unwrinkl'd now by age or pain—
Not as when last he drank her breath
And watch'd the troubl'd brow of death,
But, clad in nature's earliest dress,
In all her virgin loveliness ;
As when, like vision from above,
She taught his youthful soul to love.
—He sees—and all the man revives—
Sees—and a second life he lives.
He loves to watch the daughter's tear
Fall as he speaks the mother's praise ;
He loves to fill her hungry ear
With tender tales of other days.
Still more he loves—to feed her eye
With visions of futurity ;
To bid her bow before the Throne
Of the Eternal One—
Content, nay glad, to linger here
This solitary flower to rear.

II.

But, O, if in some unblest'd hour,
The spoiler seeks that single flower ;
And—spite of all the hallow'd fence
That guards the breast of innocence—
Spite of the watch which angels keep
—Those airy guards—who never sleep—
Spite of the naked sword of wrath
Suspended o'er his guilty path—
—Treads on its head of maiden white—
Quenches its beam in shades of night—
—What anguish rends that father's heart,
From his pale lip what curses part—
Till taught by better creed to know,
That Heaven which gave, can heal the blow—
—O, what a sum of bliss destroy'd,
—O, what an aching boundless void
In that poor heart, so rich before,
Scarce heaven itself could yield it more.
—He might have borne to see the flood
'Run purple' with her virgin blood—

For then, as pure that crimson tide
As the pale limpid wave it dy'd---
--He might have borne to see her fall
Pierc'd by the gaunt assassin's ball---
For, through the wound, so basely given,
Her soul had wing'd its way to heaven.
But, O, that blood is doubly spilt
Whose crimson is the dye of guilt ;
And that sad heart without relief
Where anger dries the tear of grief.

III.

Such are the childless father's pangs---
And such *that* sire's intense distress,
Who, o'er the ruin'd Laura hangs,
Like the pale ghost of wretchedness.
O, it was then, when rack'd with pain
And death's dark visions round her roll,
When fever fir'd the sluggish brain,
And loos'd the secrets of her soul---

'Twas then---as touch'd by that dread dart,
Which all the hidden man unseals;
She breaks an aged parent's heart,
And all her tale of guilt reveals.

IV.

---Now---give the march sepulchral way,
Yon aged mourner must not wait---
He must not meet the light of day---
He must not pass the castle gate.
That trophi'd gate must ne'er expand,
Save to the triumphs of his name---
By day, the crowds' insulting hand
Would point to Laura's spot of shame.
No---down the secret spiral stair
They wind---and through th' shadowy cave,
And in its gloomy womb prepare
A sunless, melancholy grave.

V.

---Slow rolls the melancholy dirge
To that dark vault confin'd ;

As you have heard the sullen surge
Strive with the labouring wind---
But, to a father's struggling sigh,
Fit echo was that minstrelsy.---
---Dim burn'd the torch---its pale blue light,
Half stifled in the stagnant air,
Shed on the cheek with terror white,
The sicklier hue of cold despair---
But dimmer than this torch the eye
Of that sad father's misery. ---

VI.

Hark !---there are footsteps tread
Those chilly caverns of the dead---
Seem'd not some low responsive moan
To echo to that father's groan ?
And, from yon angle of the cave,
Some mantl'd form to take his flight ?
---Those mourners hearts were stout and brave,
Yet throb'd those iron hearts with fright
---Darkness, I ween, has power to awe
Whom nothing awes beside;

For fancy mightier ills can draw

Than e'er are verifi'd.

--They paus'd, the startling sound to catch--

'Tis gone again--in vain they watch--

Silence resumes her lonely throne

In that unfathom'd world of stone.--

---Once more he bids the mourners "speed"

And let the march of wo proceed.

VII.

They reach the cave, whose rugged mouth

Inhal'd the open air ;

They lodge this fallen flower of youth,

The coffin'd load they bear.

---Vast was that unfrequented cave,

Of hundreds it might be the grave ;

But, O, of one lone girl, the doom,

To occupy the giant tomb ;

As if these stubborn rocks were rent

To be her frowning monument.

Deep was the sepulchre, as though

To bury all a father's wo--

'Twas deep, as though from curious eye
To shroud a daughter's infamy.

VIII.

And, now, around the chilly grave,
The hooded mourners press---
---"Friar, the lost child thou could'st not save
But, O, the Father bless.
Now let some high and hallow'd verse,
Chase from his pallid lip the curse---
O, now by solemn touch assuage
That mingling storm of grief and rage."

IX.

---The chaunt begins---that holy friar
Had watch'd o'er Laura's infant hour,
Had lov'd her as another sire,
Had nam'd her once 'his own sweet flower.'
How had it gladden'd now his breast
Could he have call'd that lost one blest---
Could he have seen the glitt'ring star
Of hope, upon her grave arise;

And pointed to the winged car
On which she mounted to the skies.
--But, though he lov'd that flower of youth,
Still more he lov'd celestial truth;
And dar'd he not his prophet's harp
From heaven's high purposes to warp,
And bid it say--that foul offence,
Unwash'd by tear of penitence,
Unwash'd by that atoning flood,
The pure, the sacramental blood
Of Him---the Holy One---who dies
The lost world's sinless sacrifice--
Could e'er be raz'd, by priestly art,
By tears wrung from a father's heart,
By blood of victims vainly spilt--
--From the dark register of guilt:

X.

He bent him o'er that youthful bier,
He shed one old man's precious tear.--
--But, as the sacred hymn began
Uprose the venerable man.

It was, as though the mystic word
Touch'd in his breast some hidden chord,
And bow'd his agonized soul,
With angel hand, to heaven's control.
Seem'd then the prophet's kindling eye
At once to fill with Deity,
And seem'd to set his earthly woes.
As bright devotion's star arose.
--See, where he tends the fun'ral rite
By which the living mourn the dead;
'The requiem, now, his lips recite--
He lays her on her icy bed.--
And---'dust to dust'---you hear him cry,
And---'dust to dust'---the rocks reply.

XI.

--Nor only they--some other sound
Awakes the cavern'd depth profound--
Some echoing foot, whose hurri'd tread
Ill fits the mourner of the dead--
Some struggling voice where terror drowns
Soft pity's sweeter, gentler tones--

--And, lo! a man---whose haggard form
Shows like the spirit of the storm ;
And, like its dark and bellowing cloud
His accents burst upon the crowd---
“ Not, ‘ dust to dust,’ but *life* to dust---
“ Where Laura sleeps, De Rancè must---
---“These hands, the bridal couch have spread
“ Now wed the living to the dead.”
---Wildly he spake, and wildly leapt
Into the grave where Laura slept
The sleep of death---*that* awful sleep
Alas---too motionless, and deep
At sight, or sound, or touch to wake,
Save when the last loud thunders shake
The heavens, and elemental war
Summons the dead to God’s high bar.

XII.

--Could she have wak’d---her startl’d form
Had fled the touch of vice ;
For, haply now, she felt the worm
That neither sleeps nor dies....

--She wak'd not--and De Rancè lay
As still as though himself were clay--
Stunna'd by the fall, it seem'd as though
Both perish'd by a single blow.

XIII.

---O---o'er the aged Chaumont's soul,
What stormy visions dimly roll.
Grief, wrath, and fierce revenge in turn
In that distemper'd bosom burn ;
As when within the mountain's side,
Impatient heaves the fiery tide.
---Swift, from the now reluctant sheath,
His thirsty falchion flew--
His dull eye shot the fire of death,
And glow'd his cheek with crimson hue--
He stood above this vital grave
As though, not that itself should save
The spoiler from his arm--as though
Resolv'd that blood should flow
To expiate the rank offence
Of violated innocence.

XIV.

But as the torches' quiv'ring light
Flash'd on the livid form below;
O then---that heart-appalling sight
Turn'd back the meditated blow.
Palsi'd, as if by wizard charm,
Fell idly down his hostile arm---
For, on De Rancè's lifeless face,
Such lines of ruin could he trace---
Of future wo, such dark presage---
Such prematurity of age---
Such lengthen'd wo, for crimes so brief---
Such awful emphasis of grief---
At once he felt to let him wake
Was measureless revenge to take---
That all the monstrous energy
Of hate itself could not supply,
A weapon of such deadly force
As the barb'd arrow of remorse.
---To *hate*---but mortal arms are given---
Remorse unsheaths the arms of heaven.

E

—“ Then let him live”—he fiercely cries,
“ The wretch, thus living, doubly dies.”

XV.

He spake—and, now, his wrinkl'd hands
O'er his wan face his mantle roll—
One moment o'er the grave he stands
In dumb dejectedness of soul.
Then flies—as if to leave behind
The anguish of his mind—
—In vain—alas—poor, childless man,
Thy grief, thy feeble steps outran ;
Seek, wanderer—seek some happier road .
—Flee from revenge and hate—to God.

XVI.

—Of all that sad and sable train
None in the vault of death remain—
They vanish'd—as the clouds of night,
Melt in the morning's bursting light—

—All went save one—that holy friar

In whom, extinct all other fire,

That flame which lights an angel's eye,

Burn'd brightly—blessed charity.

He was a man, whose wrinkl'd cheek

Might sorrow's furrowing hand bespeak,

Yet, in those furrows, seem'd to spring

Harvests of golden die ;

Peace, like the lark on morning wing,

Seeking her native sky.

XVII.

Skill'd was the reverend man to impart

Fit medicines to a broken heart.—

On the hoar mountain's rocky breast,

Where the lone eagle builds her nest,

Hung his small cell—'twas pois'd so high,

To hold deep commerce with the sky—

To 'scape the din, the toil, the strife,

That cloud the troubl'd vale of life—

But, not to shun the aching eye,

Or wrinkl'd hand of misery.

54807B

Thron'd in that lone and airy cell,
He seem'd the wide world's sentinel.
Pilgrims would climb the mountain's side
As tho' to reach some healing tide.
—They came, they saw, they smil'd—their care
Had mounted on his winged prayer.
Still seem'd he to that sorrowing crowd
An angel stooping from his cloud,
To mediate, with sweet control,
The troubl'd waters of the soul.—
—The wretched lov'd him—so did heaven—
Though much, I ween, of priestly leaven
Debas'd his creed—cradl'd in youth
Far from the lap of brightest truth,
Deni'd our common heritage,
That long and late imprison'd page,
Of which God broke the hallow'd seals,
Which highest heaven to earth reveals—
—Heaven lov'd him—and shall we
Quench the bright lamp of charity?

XVIII.

Such was the man whose melting eye
Survey'd the awful wreck below ;
No curses mingl'd with his sigh,
No vengeance roll'd upon his brow.
—If vice triumphant cross'd his path,
It stirr'd the lion of his wrath ;
—Show him that vice in grief or pain,
The lion laid him down again.
—O, as he stood above the grave,
And saw the ruin'd man beneath ;
But yesterday, so bright, so brave,
Now, stifling in the bed of death ;
And saw that strong and sinewy form
Just sinking to the hungry worm ;
And saw a man which wore the stamp
And high impress of heaven,
Dying, like some sepulchral lamp,
—And dying—unforgiven—
Then, all his fiery wrath and hate
Were buri'd in that grave ;

You heard him only supplicate
That fallen man to save—
To draw him from the worm's abode—
To lead the sufferer up to God.

XIX.

—Nor pray'd alone the aged man—
Finish'd his hands what prayer began.
Plung'd in the grave he toils to bear
De Rancè to the purer air.
And, in that high and gen'rous strain,
Seems all his youth to come again.
His vein with boyish vigour warms,
And nerves, long palsi'd, string his arms.
Though now, in life's last, feeblest stage,
Zeal seem'd to check the march of age;
And lend the limb, the nerve, the eye,
Some touch of immortality.—

XX.

—O sight sublime—to see the mind
Vainly, by bars of clay, confin'd,

Burst from its prison, and diffuse
O'er its dark dungeon living hues,
The half-extinguish'd man revive,
The body's very life outlive—
Then, as the strings of life decay,
Spread its light wings and soar away }
'Midst visions of eternal day.— }
—Thus have I seen the struggling star
Rise from the East, on ebon car—
Soon, o'er her sable seat she throws,
Her glittering robe of virgin snows—
Transforms, by touches soft and bright,
Her throne of clouds, to throne of light—
Pursues the bright moon to the West,
And melts upon its silver breast.

XXI.

So, in that venerable friar,
Blaz'd out the mind's ethereal fire,—
—Though stiffen'd with the frosts of age,
Wasted by weary pilgrimage,

He bore, with heart and arm unspent,
What many a tougher nerve had bent.

XXII.

—Soon 'scap'd he then the cave of death
And drank the fresh night's dewy breath.—
—And see him, now, with trembling hands,
The healing water bear—
Over the torpid form he stands
To shed its virtue there.
And, as the cooling drop descends,
His unreluctant knee he bends—
And supplicates—this silver stream,
Touch'd by some sanctifying beam,
May change to a baptismal wave
Body and soul, at once, to save.

XXIII.

Just as he spoke—the infant day
Awaking from his cloudy bed,

Secret, and soft, one purple ray
Upon that ashy visage shed.
—"He lives, he lives!"—the good man cries—
—Seem'd it the gush of blood—
—"All righteous heaven"—he dies, he dies—
"Ebb'd, has the crimson flood."—
—O'er that young orb, some fleeting cloud
Then swiftly spread its chilly shroud;
De Rancè's wan cheek ceas'd to glow;
The shade of death cross'd o'er his brow.

XXIV.

And yet, as rose the sun again
Bright from this brief and cloudy strife—
Seem'd not the old man's toil in vain,
Seem'd this the sign of coming life.
—And sign it was—the power that sent
That sun to gild the firmament,
Quicken'd, by mystic touch, the brain
And bad the spirit come again.
The icy bands of death gave way,
And the soul struggles into day.

XXV.

—But here the muse must briefly stay
The course of her advent'rous lay.
She may not soar, in one bold flight,
To scenes of day, from dens of night;
Or grasp in one undaunted strain
The heights of joy, and depths of pain.—
—*He* who compassionates her toil,
Or loves with her to pause awhile,
Shall haply see her pinion rise
'Midst happier scenes, and brighter skies;
But let him not with cold disdain
Turn from the moralizing strain
Which, ere she sinks upon her nest,
She leaves him as her fond bequest,

XXVI.

—Go—stranger—seek the awful gloom
Of Laura's unfrequented tomb!
—What, though no soothing verse be there
To chase the demons of despair;

What, though no guardian spirit weeps
Around the grave where Laura sleeps ;
What, though no plant of health be found
On that unconsecrated ground—
—Still, in the dark unletter'd stones
Rear'd over her unhallow'd bones,
And, in the weeds which slowly wave
On her uncanonized grave,
And, in the fitful blast which falls
Upon those shapeless, sunless walls—
—There is a voice, so deep, so dread,
So like the accents of the dead---
It strikes the culprit's iron ear
And fills him with unearthly fear.---
He sees a more than mortal light
Break o'er these regions of the night---
He clasps his hands---he bends his knee---
—"Vise, Vice," he cries---"is Misery!"

And---so it is---treasure that truth
Deep in the snowy breast of youth---
—Hence the dead Laura's hapless lot ;
'The living Laura knew it not.

DE RANCÉ.

CANTO FOURTH.

DE RANCÈ.

CANTO FOURTH.

I.

THE roar of brazen-throated war,
The smoking steel, the purple car ;
The weeping valley, once so fair,
Now plough'd by ruin's deadly share ;
The once unspotted virgin flood
Now rolling in its bed of blood ;
The mountain bleach'd by many a bone
---These works, fallen man, are all thine own.
The shepherd's pipe amid the rocks,
The mountain bleach'd with thousand flocks,
The warbling language of the grove,
The mellow harmony of love,
The simple spire that climbs the sky,
So cheering to the good man's eye--

The laughing vale uncurs'd with strife,
The teaming landscape full of life,
The happy father's green abode---
---These, these are all the works of God---
Man sheds destruction o'er the plain---
God bids the landscape live again.---

II.

O, then, if e'er our ark of clay
Is ting'd and warm'd by heavenly ray---
If e'er, to prostrate man is given
The mind and high impress of heaven,
'Tis when, on his uplifted eye
God sheds the beams of charity---
'Tis when, in Misery's cold recess,
He seeks the bed of wretchedness ;
Or---nobler---roves from pole to pole
To save a life, or win a soul---
---And, if there's aught of human bliss
Kindred to that of Paradise,
'Tis that which fills his bursting heart
Whose holy, happy bands impart.

Life to the lifeless---and detain
A spirit from the world of pain---
---His bliss they never, never feel,
Who fiercely whet the thirsty steel,
And draw, as though with vulture's beak,
Blood from the guiltless and the weak---
Who, on their laurell'd trophy see
The cold, dark drop of misery ;
And who, with orphan tears cement
Their perishable monument.---

III.

---But, O, if such the joy which sweeps
Over the bosom of the good,
Why stands that aged friar and weeps?
---His are the tears of gratitude---
Tears, whose dumb eloquence express
That choak'd heart's thankfulness.
None---none---may proudly hope to paint
The transport of that aged saint,
As on De Rancè's faded cheek
He saw health's ruddy morning break.

IV.

O mark him, now, upon the bed
Of his own bosom prop his head—
And now, he calls the well-known hind,
Whose steps along the valley wind,
Promptly to lend his sinewy arm,
De Rancè's chilly brow to warm,
And bear that lost one to the spot
Where stands the peasant's lonely cot—
Where 'midst wild nature's mountain scene,
And pillow'd on her lap of green—
'Midst million sweets that spring to birth,
From the full breast of mother earth—
Deems he that fallen man may find
Health of the body and the mind ;
For, in that cot, as well he knows,
Devotion's modest plant arose—
Whose living leaf of sacred balm
 Could peace and joy bestow,
The ruff'd soul could sweetly calm
 And make a heaven below.

V.

--They bear him there---the humble bed
With hands assiduous spread ;
By potent drug the nerves compose--
Bless him and leave him to repose.
They leave him---but God left him not ;
O---on the peasant's lowly cot
Was bent the eye that never sleeps,
Which, as it swiftly circling, sweeps
O'er the dark world---beheld and shed
One drop of mercy on his head.

VI.

--Long was his sleep---for long had rest
Fled from De Rancé's stormy breast ;
And seem'd, e'en now the startling limb
Too conscious of his foul offence---
Peace loves her little lamp to trim
Around the couch of innocence---

--O--over that distemper'd brain
Cross'd many a sad and ghastly train
Of woes, and crimes of darkest die--
The busy fancy's progeny.
--Radiant with more than living bloom,
Now the dead Laura seems to come--
--He strains her willing hand to clasp--
--His baffl'd hands a spectre grasp.
--Or, lull'd by soothing visions, now
He listens to her tender vow ;
Strives with fond ear to catch the sound--
--Terrific curses roll around ;--
Or, now, beneath that banner'd tower
He plants and rears love's painted bower ;
And many a dewy flow'ret there
He trains to please that giddy fair--
--At once, the scented fabric shakes--
Those twining flowers are coiling snakes--
His joys illusory expire--
He tosses on a sea of fire--
Laura--her hand with vengeance warm,
Stands like the demon of the storm.

VII.

Who would not wake from sleep like this,
 And count all waking mis'ry bliss ?
 How dread to feel the torpid brain
 To dreams like this fall back again,
 And conjure from the world below
 Vision of more than mortal wo.
 --Thus slept De Rancè, till at length,
 Exhausted even fancy's strength,
 He found a refuge from distress
 In deep and dumb forgetfulness ;
 Nor woke---till sunk the sun to rest
 On that soft bosom of the west.

VIII.

--De Rancè woke,--but *where* is he ?--
 " Whose this abode of penury--
 " Where is the Friar--and Chaumont, where,
 " And where the tomb of dark despair--
 " And whose the sweet and simple lay
 " That seems my soul to ease--

ems that untutor'd strain to say
 There is a way to peace?"
 e lists to hear the artless song
 ich swell'd the rustic chords among;
 imple was the note he heard,
 ight have been some mountain bird.

1.

and'rer on the world of waves
 ain, the little swallow craves
 Some clime of spring;
 sad she eyes the wat'ry waste,
 lighting on some friendly mast,
 She rests her aching wing.

2:

us have I wander'd far and long
 ie barren world's wide wastes among
 "In search of peace;

"I found

"Arose

"

"Now near t

"I choose my

"From

"O, still, upon

"My heart shall

"And fir

"And can it be?"

"That peace, which

"Dwells in the cotta

"That God must ban

"But hark—for no

"Awakes the artless l

"A lighter finger cross

"A sweeter voice began t

---“ I found it not---till from afar
“ Arose the holy eastern star,
“ And bade my sorrows cease.

3.

“ Now near the altar of my God,
“ I choose my safe and blest abode
“ From morn till even ;
“ O, still, upon its hallow'd breast
“ My heart shall build her lowly nest,
“ And find an earthly heaven.”

IX.

“ And can it be ?” De Rancè cries,
“ That peace, which from the mighty flies,
“ Dwells in the cottage ?---Can it be
“ That *God* must banish misery ? ●
---“ But hark---for now some gentler strain
“ Awakes the artless lyre again.”
---A lighter finger cross'd the string,
A sweeter voice began to sing ;

Again he hush'd the heart's deep sigh
To catch the rustic melody.

1.

“ Dear is the hallow'd morn to me
“ When village bells awake the day ;
“ And, by their sacred minstrelsy,
“ Call me from earthly cares away.

2.

“ And dear to me the winged hour
“ Spent in thy hallow'd courts, O Lord---
“ To feel devotion's soothing power,
“ And catch the manna of thy word.

3.

“ And, dear to me the loud ‘ Amen,’
“ Which echoes through the blest abode,

“ Which swells, and sinks and swells again,
Dies on the walls, but lives to God.

4.

“ And, dear the simple melody,
“ Sung with the pomp of rustic art;
—“ That holy heavenly harmony,
“ The music of a thankful heart.

5.

“ In secret I have often pray’d
“ And still the anxious tear would fall;
“ But on thy sacred altar laid,
“ The fire descends and dries them all.

6.

“ Oft when the world, with iron hands,
“ Has bound me in its six-days chain,
“ This bursts them, like the strong man’s hands,
“ And lets my spirit loose again.

F

7.

" Then, dear to me the Sabbath morn,
" The village bells, the shepherd's voice—
" These oft have found my heart forlorn,
" And always bid that heart rejoice.

8.

—" Go, man of pleasure, strike thy lyre,
" Of broken Sabbaths sing the charms;
" Ours are the prophet's car of fire
" Which bears us to a Father's arms."

X.

—De Rancè listen'd—and each word
Touch'd in his heart some echoing chord;
So sweet upon his ear it broke,
It was as though an angel spoke.
And even ere she ceas'd to sing,
His long-imprison'd soul took wing,

And soar'd to that high throne, whence she
Had learn'd this hallow'd harmony ;
And sought, amidst the heavenly choir,
A spark of that seraphic fire
Which might dark memory's dreams destroy
And tune his soul to songs of joy.

XI.

—Nor ceas'd he till that rustic sire,
No longer musical the strain,
Yet pregnant with celestial fire,
Began to speak again.
For he was wont—his labours done,
As softly set the summer's sun,
And from the chambers of the west
Call'd an exhausted world to rest—
To watch the half-extinguish'd ray,
And check the giddy foot of play,
And busier housewife's homely task,
And summon all to bend and ask,
Whilst linger'd yet the ray of even,
Pardon and peace from heaven.

And he would pray, that when the night
Of death should quench in clouds *his* sun,
Just such a beam, so mildly bright,
Might gild the course which he had run.

XII.

—'Twas now the hour—and through the door,
Part open'd, might De Rancè see—
How falsely those are deem'd the poor
Whose breasts are rich in piety—
No brighter gem, I ween, is set
In Bourbon's blazing coronet,—
—O, how his pulse beat quick and high—
How rush'd the tear-drop to his eye,
As, one by one, the little clan
Came trooping round the plain good man;
And won a smile, or stole a kiss,
The roses of their paradise.
Seem'd it to him—that holy love,
Exil'd from courts—like some lone dove
Which ruffian violence expels,
Fled here—and to the village bells

Sat listening, while she plum'd her wing—
Then 'gan responsive notes to sing,
Till every rock and waving wood,
Rang with the hymn of gratitude.—

XIII.

—The greeting o'er, that happy sire
Trims cheerly up his little fire ;
And strives to light in every eye,
The ray of reverend gayety ;
For well he knew—the ear of youth
Is trebly barr'd against the truth
That comes disfigur'd in the dress
Of cold and scowling wretchedness—
That, who the infant soul would move
Must make it feel—that “ God is love.”

XIV.

—Then, when his watchful eye could trace
Joy thron'd upon each ruddy face—

De Rancè sees him raise his hand
To that high shelf where marshall'd stand
A few lean volumes, all his store,
—Small prize to him—of worldly lore.
High o'er the rest—one volume stood—
—It was the sacred book of God—
That book which, to the astonish'd eye,
Unveils the present Deity—
Which, from the tossing couch of pain,
Oft lifts us as with viewless chain,
And recreates the famish'd sense
With highest heaven's magnificence.—
—O, as the rustic father took,
With sun-burnt hand, that poor man's book,
'Twas just as when the morning's breath
Crosses the wan and withering wreath,
And sheds, as though with mystic power,
A sudden freshness o'er the flower—
—You saw the beam of gladness break
In sudden lustre o'er his cheek.

XV.

—Then, as the wary pilot tries
To land his bark on safest shores,
This treasur'd wisdom of the skies,
The parent's anxious eye explores,
Some simple, touching page to find,
Such as might win the infant mind.
—Nor sought he long, for though there lie
Plung'd in the abyss of mystery,
(Like gems in deepest caverns found)
Depth for the deepest too profound ;
Yet, float upon that sacred sea,
The flowers of sweet simplicity—
Flowers, perfum'd by breath of heaven,
To simplest minds profusely given.

XVI.

—He sought not long—for soon his eye
Lights on the moving history,

Where He, the guilty world's High Lord,
By infant cherubim ador'd,
Bade "little children come" and rest.
Their heads upon his hallow'd breast.
—Finish'd the tale—the holy man
To school his little tribe began—
—At once—arose that childish band,
At once, they seiz'd his horny hand,
And bade him guide them on the road
That leads—to happiness and God.
—O ! if there be whose scornful eyes
The poor man's simple joys despise—
I would they had been there to see
What are the joys of poverty,
To count the precious tears which start,
Warm from a poor man's thankful heart.
—He wept to see the golden morn
Of piety, thus early dawn ;
He wept to see the breathing page
Thus sweetly touch their tender age ;
Transform them as with Prophet's rod,
And make his child—the child of God.

—Then—for in that more southern clime
They fondly love the tinkling rhyme,
And each gay peasant, as he roves,
Catches the music of the groves,
The warbling language of the sky,
Sweet nature's holy melody—
—Then might you see that happy sire
Resume his ne'er forgotten lyre :
And as he swept the simple string,
Wake every infant lip to sing
Strains which might wound a critic's ear,
But which a God delights to hear.

XVII.

—De Rancè heard the song—and such
The magic of the truth,
So do the notes of nature touch
Sung by a childish mouth,
He fondly thought, that as they sang
Heaven's azure vault responsive rang;
And, sailing by on angel wing,
A million spirits seem'd to sing,

A million voices seem'd to say,
"Come, fellow-spirits, come away."
—Fain would he, then, have burst his chain
To soar amidst that infant train.
—De Rançè—no—ere *that* shall be,
Oft must thou bend thine unbent knee—
Oft, on that sin of scarlet dye,
Shed the hot tear of misery—
Stoop from thine airy throne of pride,
And bow before "the crucifi'd."

XVIII.

—But, O—how labour'd every vein
In that poor prostrate man,
As thus, to moralize again,
The rustic sire began :
—" My children---if your infant eyes
" Would see the wretchedness of vice—
" Go, count the wrinkles of the head
" Now stretch'd upon our lowly bed—
" Go there, and mark that blasted tree
" Curs'd by the breath of Deity—

" Go, read the lesson writ in blood,
" That ' none are happy but the good.'
" Then, sweet ones, shall our simple pray'r
" Ask heaven to smooth his brow of care ;
" To heal the branch so deeply riven,
" And lift its leafless head to heaven."

XIX.

—They bow the knee—prefer the prayer---
O, as it floated in mid air
Above that agonized bed—
An angel, from his censer, shed
Sweet incence—on whose sainted wings
To Meroy's golden throne it springs—
And brings a thousand blessings down
On him who dared not hope for one.

XX.

—I must not linger, now, to paint
The raptures of that rustic saint

When, echoing to his own, arise
De Rancè's accents to the skies.
When from the ground, and prostrate there
He breath'd the penitential prayer—
When heaven a beam of mercy shed
Upon that lost one's aching head---
---Nor may the infant muse essay
To trace, in metaphysic lay,
The mind's slow march from earth to heaven,
Th' acquittal of the unforgiven---
The gradual dawn---the burst of light
Upon that soul of thickest night—
The mental flowers which strangely blow,
Like roses on a waste of snow.

XXI.

---He who has climb'd the giddy height
Where Polar mountains rise
Mantled in everlasting white,
Pillar'd on props of ice---
And seen, from six months' chilly sleep,
The tardy sun arise---

Now, on th' horizon dimly creep—
Now, rush o'er all the skies ;—
And seen the frozen thousands come
To greet the wanderer home—
And heard each cavern's deep recess
Echo the shout of thankfulness---
--*That* favour'd man might not despair,
With magic colours borrow'd there,
And other skill than mine---to trace
The lights which, slowly stealing, chase
The mental shades—and o'er the soul
A golden tide of glories roll.
--Still, lest the more ambitious muse
To touch this lowly theme refuse,
Ere sinks to rest my dying strain,
I sweep the timid string again.

XXII.

--Where, 'midst her gloomy waste of wood,
And girt by many a rushing flood,
Whose deep and melancholy moan
Seems but the never-ceasing groan

Of those who, fell'd by secret blow,
Sink in the hungry gulf below--
La Trappe her mitred forehead rears,
Gray with the storms of thousand years--
--There--rises, 'midst the unbroken gloom,
One low and solitary tomb--
Which, if the hooded palmer see,
At once he bends his nerveless knee--
Crosses, devout, his aged breast,
And seems to lay his cares to rest.
--The wretched often wander there
To shed the tear of dark despair ;
They kneel--the tear has dri'd away,
Like mist-drops in the blush of day.
And often, when the midnight bell
Wakes the cold slumbers of his cell,
The watchful monk, with feet unshod,
Comes here, as though to meet his God ;
As though there dwelt, in that dark hour,
And darker grave, mysterious power,
To touch the hidden springs of vice,
And all its power to paralyze ;

To break corruption's awful spell,
And rout the rebel hosts of hell.

XXIII.

—Ask—*why* he comes?—and he replies,
—“ O, 'tis a heaven below the skies—
“ There is a spirit lingers here
“ Which chases every scalding tear—
“ Angels keep watch around the tomb,
“ And light from God dispels the gloom.”
—Ask “ *whose* the canonized bones
“ That sleep 'midst yonder unhewn stones?”
—“ *De Rance's*—there imprison'd lies,
“ Whatever of a good man dies—
—“ The man himself has burst his prison,
“ And to his Master's bosom risen.
—“ Once *bad* and *wretched*—to his God,
“ At length, the stiffen'd knee he bent;
“ Some spirit wav'd a viewless rod
“ Above the prostrate penitent.
“ O, then, a sacred influence stole
“ Over his agonized soul,

“ And beam’d upon his aching eye, }
“ Those sister visions of the sky, }
“ The stars of *peace* and *piety*. }
---“ ’Twas just as when, ere time began,
“ Ere waken’d uncreated man,
---“ Some breath o’er all the chaos blows---
---“ At once the Lord of earth arose,
“ And, as with front erect he trod,
“ Seem’d to be only less than God.
---“ So---rose De Rancè---from the dust
“ Of sordid, selfish, brutal lust---
“ So bright the alter’d course he ran,
“ Men deem’d him something more than man.
---“ Oft would he climb yon hill at even,
“ To catch a nearer glimpse of heaven---
“ With moralizing eye to trace
“ The lessons writ on nature’s face---
“ To see, in rocks by lightning rent,
“ Wrath’s melancholy monument---
“ In the gay flower and spicy grove,
“ The fairer evidence of love.”
---Then kindling with a Prophet’s fire,
Seiz’d he his prostituted lyre,

As, anxious, to expunge the stain
Of his once wild and lawless strain---
And first upon the listening sense,
Stole the sad notes of penitence---
With trembling hand, and stifling breath,
He sang of guilt, and wo, and death.
---Soon rais'd to heaven his dewy eye,
Subsides that touching melody---
Seems, then, fair peace, with golden wing,
To light upon his sorrowing string.
---At once, there bursts upon the ear
Such harmony as angels hear---
And the glad rock, and hill, and flood,
Echo the notes of gratitude.
---Thus liv'd and di'd the holy man,
And, stranger---who, with weary span,
Hast reach'd these lonely towers---would'st thou
Some surer path---to rapture know
Than that his erring footsteps trod?
---Then---*shun his crimes*---but---*serve his God*.

XXIV.

“ What, then, the moralist may say--
“ And does the superstitious lay
“ Direct the pilgrim to the lap
“ Of bigotry, and dark La Trappe
“ In search of bliss--to sunless towers
“ Where fast and penance waste the hours
“ Which man demands---to Moloch's throne,
“ To gloomy rites---to men of stone,
“ To the cold cell---and midnight grove,
“ Where 'tis forgot that ‘ God is Love ? ’ ”

XXV.

---No, reasoner---no---perish the lay
That would the pilgrim lead astray;
To one, sole altar points this hand---
---The altar of my native land.---
---Church of my sires---my love to thee
Was nurtur'd with my infancy;

And now maturer thoughts approve
The object of that infant love---
Link'd to my soul with hooks of steel
By all I say, and do, and feel---
By records that refresh my eye
In the rich page of memory---
By blessings at thine altar given---
By scenes which lift the soul to heaven---
By monuments which proudly rise
The trophies of the good and wise---
By graves, for ever sad and dear,
Still reeking with my constant tear,
Where those in honour'd slumber lie,
Whose deaths have taught me how to die---
---And shall I not, with all my powers,
Watch round thy venerable towers?
And can I bid the pilgrim flee
To holier mother than to thee?
And can I bid him turn his feet,
From fields with flowers of mercy sweet,
To gloomy wastes, and chilly cells,
Where frowning superstition dwells?

---Still---such is truth's resistless art,
To heal a lost and broken heart---
And such, though wrapp'd in deep disguise,
Its sleepless, countless, energies---
That though De Rancè's erring eye
Woo'd the dark shade of piety---
Heard but the thunders of its law---
Quench'd more than half his love in awe---
Sweet mercy mark'd that suppliant's knee,
Who bow'd too low her smile to see---
And heard his penitential prayer,
And made him *happy--even there.*

NOTES.

NOTE TO CANTO FIRST.

The following extract from the Nouveau Dictionnaire Historique, 8me édition. A. Lyon. An. xii. 1804. will serve to give the reader a connected view of the history of the subject of this poem ; and the brevity and clearness of the account has led the author to prefer it to a more minute statement.

“RANCÈ (Dom Armand Jean le Bonthillier de) né à Paris le 9 Janvier, 1626, étoit neveu de Claude le Bonthillier de Chavigni secrétaire d'état et surintendant des finances. Il fit paroître dès son enfance de si heureuses dispositions pour les belles-lettres, que dès l'âge de douze à treize ans, à l'aide de son précepteur, il publia une nouvelle édition des Poésies d'Anacréon, en Grec ; avec des notes, 1639. in 8vo. Il devint chanoine de Notre Dame de Paris, et obtint plusieurs abbayes ; des belles-lettres il passa à la théologie, et prit ses degrés en Sorbonne avec la plus grande distinction. Il fut reçu docteur en 1654. Le cours de ses études fini, il entra dans le monde, et s'y livra à toutes ses passions, et sur-tout à celle de l'amour. On veut même qu'elle ait occasioné sa conversion ; on dit que l'abbé de Rancè, au retour d'un voyage,

allant voir sa maîtresse dont il ignoroit la mort monta par un escalier dérobé, et qu'étant entré dans l'appartement, il trouva sa tête dans un plat on l'avoit séparée du corps, parce que le cercueil de plomb qu'on avoit fait faire, étoit trop petit. *Voyez des véritables motifs de la conversion de l'abbé de Rancè, par Daniel de la Roque, Cologne 1695. in 12mo* D'autres prétendent, que son aversion pour le monde fut causée par la mort ou par les disgrâces de quelques-uns de ses amis, ou par le bonheur d'être sorti sans aucun mal de plusieurs grands périls : les balles d'un fusil qu'il devoient naturellement le percer, ayant donné dans le fer de sa gibecière : Il y'a apparence que tous ces motifs réunis, contribuèrent à son changement de vie. Du moment qu'il le projeta, il ne parut plus à la cour. Retiré dans sa terre de Veret. auprès de Tours, il consulta les évêques d'Aleth, de Pamiers et de Cominges. Leurs avis furent différens ; celui du dernier fut d'embrasser l'état monastique. Le cloître ne lui plaisoit point alors : mais, après de mûres réflexions, il se détermina à y entrer. Il vendit sa terre de Veret 300 milles livres, pour les donner à l'Hôtel Dieu de Paris ; et ne conserva de tous ses bénéfices que le prieuré de Boulogne de l'ordre De Grammont et son Abbaye de la Trappe de l'ordre de Cîteaux. Les religieux de ce monastère y vivoient dans le dérèglement. L'Abbé de Rancè, tout rempli de ses projets de retraite, demande au roi et obtient un brevet pour pouvoir y établir la réforme. Il prend ensuite l'habit régulier dans l'abbaye de

erseigne, est admis au noviciat en 1663, et fait profession l'année d'après, âgé de 39 ans. Le pape de Rome lui ayant accordé des expéditions pour rétablir l'austérité dans son abbaye, il exhorta si vivement ses religieux, que la plupart embrassèrent la nouvelle règle. L'abbé de Rancé fit voulu faire dans tous les monastères de l'ordre de Cîteaux ce qu'il avoit fait dans le sien ; mais ces soins furent inutiles. N'ayant pu étendre la réforme, il s'appliqua à lui faire jeter de profondes racines à la Trappe. Ce monastère prit en effet une nouvelle vie. Continuellement consacré aux travail des mains, à la prière et aux austérités les plus effrayantes, les religieux y tracèrent l'image des anciens solitaires de la héraïde. Ce monastère fit sentir non seulement aux cœurs les plus tièdes, jusqu'à quel point le soi vive et ardente peut nous rendre chères les privations les plus rigoureuses ; mais il offrit une simple philosophie, dit d'Alembert, une matière terréssante de réflexions profonde sur le néant : l'ambition et de la gloire, les consolations de la traite, et le bonheur de l'obscurité.' Le réformateur des religieux de la Trappe, voulant se détacher entièrement des choses terrestres, les priva des amusemens les plus permis. L'étude leur fut interdite ; la lecture : l'Ecriture Sainte et de quelques Traités de morale, voilà toute la science qu'il disoit leur envenir. Pour appuyer son idée, il publia son *Traité de la sainteté et des devoirs de l'état monastique* : ouvrage qui causa une dispute entre

l'austère réformateur, et le doux et savant Maillon. Cette guerre ayant été calmée, il fallut qu'il soutint une autre avec les partisans d'*Arnault*. Il écrivit sur la mort de cet homme illustre, une Lettre à l'Abbé Nicaise, dans laquelle il se permettoit des réflexions qui déplurent. *Enfin*, disoit il, *voilà M. Arnault mort; après avoir poussé sa carrière aussi loin qu'il a pu, il a fallu qu'elle se soit terminée. Quoi qu'on dise, voilà bien des questions finies.* La liberté qu'il se donna de recevoir des religieux des autres ordres presque toujours malgré leurs supérieurs, lui fit un grand nombre d'ennemis, d'autant plus qu'il avoit peint avec des traits fort vifs la corruption des autres cloîtres, et la perfection du sien. L'abbé de la Trappe, accablé de infirmités, crut devoir se démettre de son abbaye. Le roi lui laissa le choix du sujet, et il nomma Dom *Zozime*, qui mourut peu de tems après. Dom *Gervaise* qui lui succéda, mit le trouble dans la maison de la Trappe. Il inspiroit aux religieux un nouvel esprit, opposé à celui de l'ancien Abbé, qui ayant trouvé le moyen d'obtenir sa démission la fit remettre entre les mains du roi. Le nouvel Abbé, surpris et irrité, courut à la cour, noircit l'Abbé de *Rancé*; mais malgré ses manœuvres, Dom *Jacques de la cour* obtint sa place. La Paix ayant été rendue à la Trappe, le pieux réformateur mourut tranquille, le 26 Octobre, 1700, à 74 ans. Il expira couché sur la cendre et sur la paille, en présence de l'évêque de Sées et de toute sa communauté. Lorsqu'il fut près de

rendre les derniers soupirs, on lui présenta un crucifix, qu'il embrassa avec tous les sentimens de la piété la plus tendre. Il baisa l'image du Christ et la tête de mort placée aux pied de la croix—en remettant ce signe respectable entre les mains d'un religieux, il remarqua qu'il baisoit l'image de crucifix sans baiser la tête de mort ; il lui dit avec vivacité, *Pourquoi ne baisiez vous pas cette tête ? Baisez mon Père, baisiez sans peine l'image de la mort dont vous ne devez pas craindre la réalité.* Ce religieux regarda cette ordre comme un avertissement de sa mort prochaine. En effet, il mourut peu de temps après. L'abbé *De Rancé* possédoit de grandes qualités, un zèle ardent, une piété éclairée, une facilité extrême à s'annoncer et à écrire. Son style est noble, pur, élégant ; mais il n'est pas assez précis. Il ne prend que la fleur des sujets, et il est beaucoup moins profond que *Nicole* et *Bourdaloue*. L'ambition avoit été sa grande passion avant son changement de vie : il tourna ce feu qui le devoit du côté de Dieu ; mais il ne put pas se détacher entièrement de ses anciens amis. Il dirigeoit un grand nombre de personnes de quailité, et les lettres qu'il écrivait continuellement en réponse aux leurs, occupèrent une partie de sa vie. On a dit 'qu'il s'étoit dispensés comme législateur, de la loi qui force ceux qui vivent dans le tombeau de la Trappe d'ignorer ce qui se passe sur la terre ;' mais on peut dire pour l'excuser, que sa place l'obligeoit à ces relations, et qu'on s'en servit souvent pour ramener, les personnes

du monde dans le voie du salut. On ne peut cependant s'empêcher de reconnoître dans ses démarches les plus louables un air d'ostentation que la piété modeste évite ordinairement avec soin. Ses amis et lui voulant trop occuper le public de la Trappe, firent graver tout ce qui concernoit les bâtimens, les travaux, les exercices de ce monastère. On peignit, on grava l'Abbé, et l'on frappa des médailles en son honneur. On a de lui : I. Une *traduction Française des œuvres de St. Dorothee*, 1686, in 8vo. II. *Explication sur la règle de St. Benoît*, in 12mo. III. *Abrégé des obligations des Chrétiens*. IV. *Reflexions morales sur les quatre Evangiles*, 4 vols. in 12mo. et des *Conférences* sur le même sujet, aussi, en quatre vol. V. *Instructions et Maximes*, in 12mo. VI. *Conduite chrétienne*, composée pour Mad. de Guise, in 12mo. VII. Un grand nombre de *Lettres Spirituelles*, en 2 vols. in 12mo. Elles ne renferment pas à beaucoup près toutes celles qu'il a écrites. Il étoit en relation avec un grand nombre d'écrivains, 'et il ne manquoit pas, dit d'Avrigni de les payer d'un compliment fort gracieux, lorsqu'ils lui envoyoient leurs ouvrages.' VIII. Plusieurs *Ecrits* au sujet des études monastiques. IX. *Relations de la vie et de la mort de quelques religieux de la Trappe*, en 4 vols. in 12mo. aux qu'elles on en a ensuite ajouté deux. X. *Les Constitutions et les réglemens de la Trappe*, 1701, 2 vols. in 12mo. XI. *De la sainteté des devoirs de l'état Monastique*, 1683, 2 vols. in 4to. Avec des *Eclair-*

cissemens sur ce livre, 1695, in 4to. Voyez les vies de l'Abbé de Rancè, composées par *Maupeou* par *Mursollier*, et par Dom *le Nain*. Consultez aussi l'*Apologie de Rancè*, par Dom *Gervaise*, contre ce qu'en dit Dom *Vincent Thuillier*, dans son *Histoire* de la contestation excitée au sujet des Etudes Monastiques, au tome premier des œuvres posthumes de *Thiérri Ruinart* et *Jeun Mabillon*. Il y a quelques bonnes réflexions dans cette Apologie, mais trop de hauteur et de vivacité. Voyez III. Neveu."

NOTE TO CANTO SECOND.

"Laura's corpse was there."—St. XXIV. p. 77.

As the authenticity of this fact in the life of De Rancè has recently been disputed by the learned and candid Mr. Butler, it may be desirable to adduce a part at least of the evidence on which it rests. And this evidence is so well stated in a letter from a friend, remarkably familiar with this department of literature, that the author ventures to give a part of this letter with its necessary alterations.

"WHEN young, I remember continually to have heard this particular in the life of De Rancè, related by French emigrants and others. But its improbability led me very early to consider it, either as a mere invention, or as a history of which the incidents had dilated in a sort of poetical ratio, on its journey from Paris to London. On reading afterwards Marsollier's and Dom le Nain's Lives of De Rancè, I found no trace of the story. Soon afterwards, however, I chanced to obtain, among other old Catholic books, one entitled "Véritables causes de la conversion de M. de Rancè," in which

this story is given at full length. This little volume was written by Daniel de la Roque, and published at Cologne, in 1685, that is, fifteen years before the death of the Abbé de Rancè, and at least twenty years before Marsollier's or Le Nain's works were written. It now occurred to me that, however improbable the story might be, yet since this account had been published in the Abbé's life time, it was remarkable, that neither he nor his friends should have contradicted, if false, a statement which involved, not merely his *own* reputation, but (as it there appeared) the honour and character of a lady of the highest rank and accomplishments in France. I further reasoned,—that, even on the very improbable supposition of the “*Causes Véritables*,” not having found their way into the solitudes of La Trappe, they must, at all events, have been known to Marsollier and Dom le Nain, especially as the story had evidently then obtained general circulation. How then was it to be accounted for, that these writers should not have formally noticed and officially contradicted this story, if untrue?—Such a contradiction would have been equally acceptable to the house of Montbason, and to the Monks of La Trappe. It, moreover, occurred to me, that the very *silence* of these two writers, in a measure served to substantiate La Roque's affirmation. They both admit that De Rancè fell into every species of dissipation; and both obviously shrink from giving any de-

tailed statement of his delinquencies. If the story was false, it appeared improbable that they should not contradict it. If, on the contrary, the story was true, it was perfectly intelligible, that they might prefer silence to the restatement of a fact which, without answering any important purpose, served to fix a stigma on two of the most noble houses in France. Truth was satisfied by a general confession that he was very dissipated. However, this evidence did not satisfy me. The next testimony that I discovered was in the 'Dictionnaire Historique,' published in 1804. In this work, designed chiefly to promote Catholicism in France, this story, abridged indeed, is repeated without any apparent doubt or misgiving. Now this circumstance appeared to prove that the statement, whether true or false, was neither contradicted, nor deemed unworthy of notice in the standard biographical dictionary of France in 1804. In other words—the story had subsisted without substantial refutation 119 years. Still, however, I might perhaps have continued to doubt, had I not found in the 'Causes Célèbres,' a reference to the same story, and the names of De Rancè and the Duchess of Montbazon explicitly stated. That passage I extract for you (Causes Célèbres, Tom. 13, pages 6, 7.) "Après son décès elle (Louise de Bados) parut si hideuse et si difforme qu'on ne pouvoit la regarder qu'avec horreur. Un tel spectacle est propre à faire un grand effet sur un spectateur. Témoin Madame

la Duchess de Montbazon, douée d'une rare beauté, défigurée après sa mort. L'Abbé de Rancè qui l'aimoit en fut si frappé qu'il se convertit peu de tems après—c'est le fameux Abbé de la Trappe. Il fit avant conversion les vers suivans :

“ Nbn, je ne verrai plus Sylvie,

Un sort cruel me la ravie ;

Au milieu de ses plus beaux jours.

Mais je n'en sens pas moins le pouvoir de ses charmes,

Et lorsque ses beaux yeux se ferment pour toujours

Les miens ne sont ouverts que pour vesser des larmes.”

It is worthy of notice that the edition of the “ Causes Célèbres,” published 1747, is printed “ Au Palais.” In other words, it issues from the official press of the courts of judicature. Was it not then natural to ask,—is it conceivable that two of the most powerful and noble families of France, each holding high posts at Court, should suffer a fact of such a nature to issue amongst the juridical records of their courts of law,—to go forth to all nations and ages—and to have their names posted at full length, without offering the most direct contradiction, if such contradiction were in their possession ?”

Such is the evidence for this occurrence in the Life of De Rancè ; but it is not to be dissembled, that Mr. Butler has adduced conflicting evidence,

of a kind not easily to be controverted. Perhaps the knot would, in a measure, be cut, by admitting the fact to be true with regard to some Lady, but not with regard to the particular individual of whom it has hitherto been related. It ought, perhaps, to be suggested, that some part of Mr. Butler's reasoning, in vindication of De Rancè, is not of the most decisive nature.

One part of his vindication, for instance, is founded on the supposed age of the Duchess of Montbazou, which is alleged to have been forty-five. Now, let it be remembered, that the marriage of Louis XIV. to Madame de Maintenon, a marriage, in which he sacrificed all the usages of France, and his own personal dignity, took place when that Lady was fifty—that the Duchess of Valentinois was fifty-nine at the death of her admirer, Henry II.—that Ninon de l'Enclos continued to be the object of French admiration at eighty.

Another part, and, indeed the main fabric, of Mr. Butler's reasoning, rests on the authority of Maupeau, who published some account of De Rancè.—Of course it is of importance to ascertain the weight of Maupeau's authority. In the "*Dictionnaire Historique*," is the following parallel between Maupeau and Marsollier: "L'un et l'autre Auteur a suivi son caractère. M. Marsollier paroît plus historien, et M. de Maupeau plus orateur. Maupeau prêche la vie de M. de la Trappe—Marsollier la raconte. Marsollier insiste sur les reproches

qu'on a fait au vertueux abbé. Maupeau les dissimule, ou les enveloppe—Celui-ci (Maupeau) prend feu pour son ancien ami ; celui là (Marsollier) narré de sang froid, et sans émotion.”

But the author is by no means disposed to dispute a point after all, of small importance, with so accurate and candid a writer as Mr. Butler. That the fact has the slightest foundation in history, is sufficient for the purpose of a mere poetical narration. And the author will rejoice, as much as Mr. B. himself, to find that De Rancè was, at any period of his life, one degree less profligate than he is reported by some biographers to have been. The exculpation of any fellow creature ought to be delightful to the mind ; and especially where the supposed offender, though of a different religious community, is a Christian and an Archbishop.

NOTE TO CANTO FOURTH.

‘Where, ’midst her gloomy waste of wood.’
St. XXII. p.133.

*The following abridged translation of parts of the ‘*Precis de l’histoire de la Trappe*,’ by M. de Arnaud, is given, as supplying at once one of the best accounts of the Monastery, and of its celebrated Reformer.*

“THE Abbey of La Trappe is situated in the diocese of Sces, in the midst of an extensive valley, upon the confines of Perche and Normandy. This spot appears to have been formed by nature as a fit retreat for penitence. It is surrounded by woods, hills, and lakes, which render it almost inaccessible. The air is unwholesome, and clouded by continual vapours. Parts of the valley contain arable land, fruit trees, and pastures. A deep and awful silence reigns in these shades which seems to have been undisturbed since the foundation of the world. It is impossible to describe the sadness and awe which pervade the mind on its approach to this solitude. It is that kind of religious horror which Lucain describes, as overshadowing the forest of Marseille. What scenes are these, for the melancholy musings of the painter or the poet? Some

old trees, whose branches, like the cypress, shed a funereal gloom, and whose leaves, when agitated by the wind, yield a sound almost ominous to a superstitious ear ; and the low murmur of waters flowing through their flinty bed, announce the Abbey of La Trappe. It is very difficult to approach it without the assistance of a guide. After having descended a mountain, crossed heaths, and walked for some time through winding and intricate paths, an unknown country suddenly appears ; and the Abbey, in all its severe grandeur, at once bursts upon the spectator. You approach the first court, which is separated from that of the monks. Above the door is the statue of St. Bernard, who is represented holding in the right hand, a spade ; and in the left, a church ; which is a hieroglyphic, denoting that in every well constituted establishment, labour should be associated with piety. The second court is planted with fruit trees ; at the side, is a lower court, in which are granaries, cellars, stables, a brew-house, and a bake-house, with other buildings necessary for the convenience of a convent. At some distance is a mill, turned by water which springs from the pools. The Abbey of the 'Maison-Dieu, Notre Dame de la Trappe,' which is its original name, was founded by Rotrou the 2d, Count of Perche, in the year 1140, under the Pontificate of Innocent the 2d, and in the reign of Louis 7th, King of France, forty-two years after the foundation of Citeaux,

and twenty-five after that of Clairveux. It was erected in consequence of a vow made by Count Rotrou, who, being in danger of shipwreck, promised, in the spirit of the times, to build a monastery. On his return to his native country, he hastened to fulfil his vow, and, in order to leave to posterity a memorial of the origin of the monastery, he caused the roof of the church on the outside to be constructed in the form of a reversed keel of a ship. The edifice still retains this form. The name of Notre Dame of La Trappe, is synonymous with that of Notre Dame of 'the Steps;' for in entering the Abbey, you descend ten or twelve steps; and Trappe, in the language of the country, signifies step. This Abbey was renowned for many ages, for the irreproachable lives of its Abbots and Monks; but the fury of the civil wars, the inroads of the English, and time, the destroyer of even virtue itself, introduced into the ecclesiastical bodies, negligence and confusion. Disorder began to pervade the monastery, and it became notorious for the profligacy of its manners. The decay of spiritual life, drew along with it the ruin of the body itself. The 'Religieux' preserved no pretensions to piety, but their name. Hunting, and other more questionable amusements, became their only occupation. It was a complete scene of licentiousness; and profligacy may be said to have reached its utmost limits, at the period when the celebrated De Rancé sought a retirement there.

“ He was born at Paris, the ninth of January, 1626, the descendant of an ancient house in Brittany, where his ancestors had exercised the office of cup-bearer to the Dukes of that province, for which reason the name of ‘le Bon-thillier’ was given them. The Cardinal Richlieu was his Godfather. Mary de Medicis honoured him with her particular protection. A Chevalier of Malta, even from his infancy, he was designed for the profession of arms; but becoming, at the age of 10 years, the eldest of his family, by the death of his brother, he entered the ecclesiastical state, and became the possessor of all the benefices of his deceased brother.

“ The Abbot De Rancè was endowed by nature with that eloquence and pathos which are the characteristics of a great mind—and above all he was able to exhort the dying. And surely the power of offering consolation to those who are upon the verge of the tomb, and of assisting them to relinquish the vanities of the world, is no despicable talent, considering how few know how to die! The Abbot De Rancè, after the death of his father, at the age of 26 years, became possessed of 30 or 40,000 livres yearly income, which was a very considerable revenue for that time. Young and rich, he united with personal attractions, and those of high birth—genius, accomplishments, and courtly manners—that charm which may be styled the flower of society—that refined raillery which

adorned the Grammonts and St. Evremonts. With such advantages it was, indeed, difficult to preserve that purity of manners which seems to be the peculiar fruit of misfortune and obscurity. The Abbot de Rancè then abandoned himself to the delusive vanities with which he was surrounded—he was little animated by the spirit of his holy office; and was fond of gaming, hunting, dissipation, and luxury. Some memoirs of that time declare that his intimacy with a lady of high rank—an intimacy which has been by others delineated in the colours of the purest friendship, was founded upon more ardent and less disinterested sentiments. It is certain that, at the death of this lady, celebrated for her beauty and attractions, he showed the most lively and unequalled grief—he wandered in the midst of the most solitary woods, shedding torrents of tears, calling aloud upon the lady, and addressing his complaints to her as though she could have heard him. His despair betrayed him into the weakness of imagining that there were methods of invoking the dead; but after trying these mysterious arts he was convinced of their folly. This state of mind soon brought on an illness which had nearly proved fatal. But, on his recovery, his melancholy increased. Time, instead of alleviating, augmented the agony of his mind—The misfortunes of Cardinal De Retz, a victim to the caprices of fortune; the sudden and unexpected death of Gaston in the midst of his power—

all these circumstances had prepared his mind for the conviction of the emptiness of all human promises. Disappointed also in the most powerful of human passions, he had the courage to resist the seduction of some amiable women who endeavoured to engage him again in the pursuit of pleasure. At length, the Abbot De Rancé, disgusted with the world, regarded it as one vast tomb. He learned that important truth, that God is the only object worthy of the attachment of man—that he is our only friend and comforter. And his soul being entirely absorbed by this one grand idea—he immediately gave up his estate, which he bestowed upon the Hotel Dieu and the hospital; and resigned the presidency of three abbeys and two priories, which he held ‘in commendam.’ Whilst, however, he thus disposed of his benefices, he reserved to himself the Abbey of La Trappe, with the intention of residing as its Abbot. Having retired to Perseigne, he took the monastic habit, to which he had formerly felt an insurmountable repugnance. On the 6th of January, 1664, he took the vow: and then hastened from Perseigne to immerse himself in the solitude of La Trappe—in which place his religious melancholy seemed to be perpetuated. There he established the reform he had projected; namely, the observance of the rules of St. Benedict in all their primitive purity. We will not, however, enter into any account of his labours, or of the enmity to which he was

exposed. This illustrious recluse died at the end of the century. It is said, that even in his youth he had been heard to speak with transport of the Thebais and its recluses—who seemed to trample the world under their feet. It is also remembered, that in his journeys to Rome, he delighted to bury himself in the obscurity of the catacombs, and to cherish there that profound melancholy, which is the source of the most sublime thoughts and actions.

“The number of the Monks of La Trappe is considerable; in 1765, there were nine Monks of the choir, fifty-six lay brothers. Perpetual silence is the fundamental rule of the monastery. This rule appeared of such importance to the Founder, as to lead him to tell his pious Monks that to speak at all, and to utter blasphemies, were, in their case, crimes of equal magnitude. His opinion he maintained by these words, ‘*Sedebit solitarius et tacebit.*’ The language of La Trappe consisted, therefore, less of words than of signs. There, indeed, it may be said, that one speaks to the eyes, much more than to the ears. If any Monk is compelled to break this strict law, he speaks only in a low voice, and says no more than is absolutely necessary. They have been seen, in the agonies of death, to refuse breaking this rule, even for the purpose of asking that relief which was necessary for their existence. They have no communication with each other, either by speaking or writing; and in order

to avoid all opportunity of conversation, two Monks together are never left alone. Sometimes they go to meditate in the woods, and for this purpose, they leave the Chapter house at the sound of a bell, and in the most profound silence, each with a book in his hand, and preceded by a superior; and after having thus spent an hour and a half in meditation, they return in the same order to the monastery. Whenever they meet, they salute by bowing: and prostrate themselves only before the F. Abbot and strangers. They live in the constant mortification of every appetite. Their food, which consists of herbs, roots, and milk, is dressed with salt and water. Their only drink is inferior cider or beer; wine not being allowed in the refectory, and very seldom in the infirmary. They go to rest at eight o'clock in the summer, and in winter at seven. They rise in the night at two, to go to the matins, which generally last till half past four. It is a most striking sight to see fifty or sixty Monks assembled in the midst of a church lighted by a single gloomy lamp—now prostrating themselves on the ground—now standing upright in profound meditation; and all with one voice proclaiming the praise of the Supreme Being. They work every day for the space of three hours, one hour and a half in the morning, and the same in the afternoon, chiefly employing themselves, during these hours of labour, in agriculture, in washing, in the care of the stables, and in sweeping the cloisters.

They also occupy themselves in writing, in binding books, in the business of a joiner, in turning, in making spoons of box, and wicker baskets. At seven o'clock the bell is rang for them to retire; and every one goes to bed—that is, lies down with his clothes on, upon a board, covered with rough mattress, the pillow stuffed with straw, and a coverlet without sheets—for they never undress. The furniture of their cells consists of a little table, a rush chair, a small wooden chest without a lock.

“ Physicians are never suffered to enter La Trappe. The sick rise every day at half past three, and retire to rest at the same hour as the rest of the community. They assist at all the services in the choir of the infirmary; and the rest of the day they employ in reading, in prayer, and in labour, proportioned to their strength. They are not even permitted to lean upon a chair—are condemned to perpetual silence, even during the night—they are not suffered to notice what is passing in the infirmary. They persevere in their system of abstinence, even in their last moments—attend the chapel, leaning upon the arm of the overseer of the infirmary, receive the last sacraments, and return, in the same manner, to be stretched upon straw and ashes, and in this posture to await the approach of death, surrounded by all the members of the community; and, in these moments, the most astonishing heroism is exhibited—the dying man giving comfort instead of receiving it. We must acknowledge, that such death-beds are seldom witnessed in the world.

“ They seize every opportunity of practising the virtue of self-humiliation. Regardless of their own wishes, they obey, not merely the superior, but even the signal of the lowest of the community. They even court suffering with such eagerness as to practise voluntary mortifications in addition to those enforced by the rules of

the institution; and, what is still more surprising, a sweet serenity is displayed in their countenance; and their joy appears to increase in proportion as they exercise greater austerities. When a Monk has determined to take the vow, he sends to his family a renunciation of his estate: and, having made his profession, he at once breaks off all communication with his friends, and even with his relations—thus totally losing sight of the world. This Monastery receives no gifts. But, although not rich, it finds means, by a sort of recompense attached to virtue, to make large charitable donations. No less than 1500 poor sometimes flock to the gates of the convent—to whom they give portions of bread, and even money. When the Abbot hears of the death of a relation of any of the society, he recommends him to the prayers of the community, but without stating any particulars—simply announcing, in general terms, that the father, mother, &c. of one of the brothers is dead.

“Guests are received nearly in the following manner: the Porter, who is one of the Monks, opens the door, and after having said—‘*Deo gratias*’—prostrates himself. He then leads the stranger into the hall, and goes to apprise the F Abbot, who gives orders to the Monk, whose office it is to receive guests, to go and meet them. He obeys, and having also prostrated himself, conducts them to the church, where he gives them holy water—leads them to the apartment allotted for them, and reads them some pious book—after having said ‘*Benedicte*,’ by way of salutation. The fare of the guests is the same with that of the Recluses, with the addition of a plate of eggs. They never give them fish, although the lakes are full of them. They read during their repast ‘*l’Imitation*,’ or some work of the same nature. The guests are seldom admitted to the Refectory, for fear they should distract the attention of the monks, and introduce the spirit of the world; a spirit so

opposite to that by which this assembly of Christian Philosophers is animated.

“ I forgot to say that there are verses inscribed in many parts of the cloisters. One is tempted to believe, that these good monks have carried their humility and contempt of the art of pleasing to such an extent, as to choose the worst verses for these inscriptions. The following inscription, placed over the door of the Refectory, is a specimen of the rest :

‘ Quelqu’ herbe cuite au sel, avec un peu de pain
Est le seul mets qu’on sert, en tous temps, sur la table;
C’est bien peu : mais le corps ne sens pas qu’il a faim,
Quand le cœur vit, et se sent plein
De l’amour d’un object infiniment aimable.’

“ And since some persons, who do not think very profoundly, are apt vehemently to exclaim against an institution in which human nature seems to be always at war with herself—where she is stifled and annihilated by the excessive austerities of unheard of mortifications, I will take the liberty of noticing these objections. La Trappe would certainly be too austere, if, in this, as in other religious orders, they only admitted young people, who, either from inclination or indolence, were tempted to embrace the monastic life. But La Trappe is peculiarly a house of refuge for those who have lived disorderly lives, and are tormented by an evil conscience. Contemplated in this point of view, this foundation may be considered as one of the most wise and useful of the constituted orders. Even, independent of religion, let us regard it only by the light of reason. It has been at all times a custom amongst the Egyptians, the Greeks, and Romans, and, indeed, amongst all people, and in all religions, to establish expiatory asylums—and certainly an asylum, where the

criminal, touched with remorse for his crimes, may throw himself into the arms of a merciful God—where the vehemence of humiliation may contribute to atone for his crimes--and where, in a word, the penitent may come to enjoy the hope of one day inheriting the reward of the righteous---such an establishment, I say, ought to command the esteem and veneration of mankind. I had nearly stated a solemn truth---what mortal is there, who shall dare to assert, that he himself may not one day become criminal, and himself desire to take refuge in this asylum of expiation."

This history is given, of course, without any intention of subscribing to its religious doctrines, or to its reasoning in defence of the institution. Whilst, however, the author more than doubts the expediency of such institutions; and whilst he cannot hesitate to condemn a scheme of theology, in which the penitent is shut out from the common duties of life, and is taught to offer, by the severities of one period of life, a sort of expiation for the offences of another—he cannot but feel the highest admiration of the piety of many of these devout recluses; and knows few works better calculated to awaken devotional feelings than the *Relation de la vie, &c. de quelques religieux de l'Abbaye de la Trappe*. It is a matter of surprise that those who appear

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theoretically to set so little value upon the atonement of a Saviour, should practically love and serve Him as they in many instances appear to have done.

THE END.

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